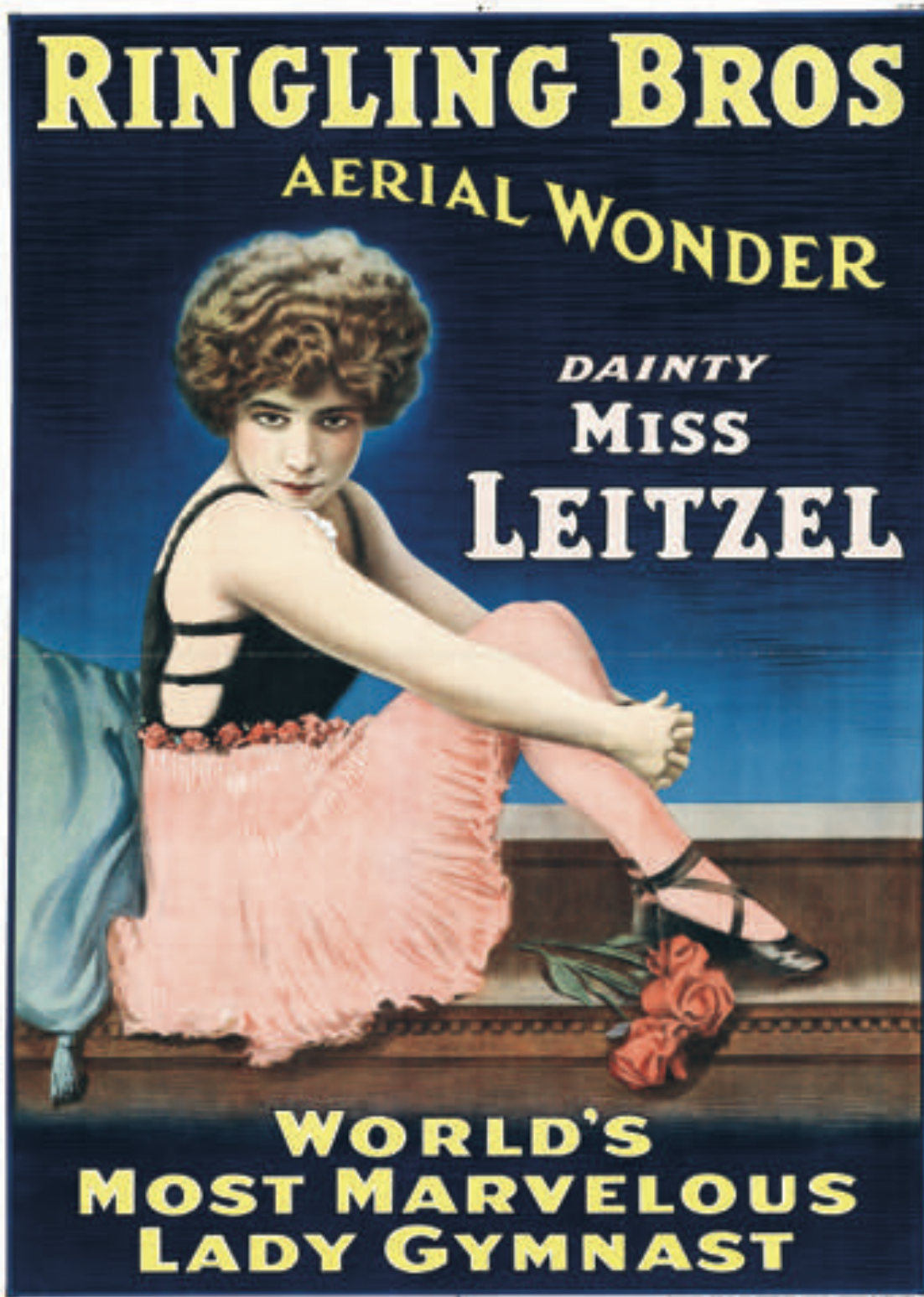


Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

Vol. 62 No. 4 2018



About the covers

On the cover of this issue of *Bandwagon* is a Ringling Bros. poster for the “dainty Miss Leitzel” that dates from 1918, the last season for *The World’s Greatest Shows* before its combination with the Barnum show. It was exactly 100 years ago that the surviving Ringling brothers – Alf T., Charles and John – were planning the consolidation of the two massive enterprises into one “Super Circus” that would debut in New York on March 21 the following spring. Already an international circus headliner, Lillian Leitzel (1891-1931) would receive top billing on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows for the next twelve years.

Bandwagon covers have featured Leitzel posters on two prior occasions. The first was seen on the front of the September-October 1970 issue. It was a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey lithograph that was printed in 1922. The second was a poster promoting Leitzel and the Flying Codonas during a winter engagement at Cirque d’Hiver in Paris at the end of 1930. It appeared as a fold-out cover November-December 2011.

Leitzel was truly one of the greatest circus stars of the 20th century. She thrilled audiences with her Roman ring act, ending her routine with a rhythmic set of one-arm planges as thousands of voices from the big top seats counted each one. Her career came to a sudden end on February 13, 1931 when a rigging mechanical failure caused a fall during a performance in Copenhagen. She died less than two days later.

The photograph of Lillian Leitzel on the back cover was taken at the Daguerre Studio in Chicago c. 1918, prior to the opening performance of *The Greatest Show on Earth* in 1919. This photograph was used for the first time in the 1919 Ringling-Barnum souvenir program. It pictures Miss Leitzel at the pinnacle of her sensational career.

GTP

Circus World Museum



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Mission Statement

“To preserve, promote, and share through education the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present.”

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Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

2018 Volume 62, Number 4

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July 1989

Circus Historical Society 2019 Convention Sarasota May 1-4

A power-packed lineup is planned for the 2019 CHS convention in Sarasota, Florida. Watch for details on the CHS website: <<https://circushistory.org>>.

Registration Convention registration rates and the registration form are available on the website. The registration form will also be included in the next issue of *Bandwagon*.

Convention Hotel Hilton Garden Inn, 8270 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota FL 34243. Standard rooms are \$99.00. Double occupancy rooms are \$109.00. Both plus applicable taxes until May 1. Breakfast included! Call 844-266-9264 for reservations.



*The Ringling will be one highlight available to tour including art, Ca' d'Zan and **circus**.*

photos by Pete Adams & John Wells

Call for Convention papers and presentations

CHS members and others who desire to make a presentation at the Circus Historical Society convention in Sarasota are invited to submit a proposal by February 20, 2019. Submissions should include a short abstract of the presentation and technology needs. Additional information is available on the CHS website.

Mail Proposals to: Deborah W. Walk
5138 Summerwood Ct
Sarasota, FL 34233
or email proposals to: DWWalk@aol.com



Tour the Tibbals Learning Center and see the Howard Bros. model circus, the Wisconsin rail car, and circus, circus, circus.



Seeking Submissions for Stuart Thayer Prize

Nominations The Circus Historical Society is seeking nominations for this year's Stuart Thayer Prize. The prize recognizes a superior work in circus history and is named in honor of Stuart Thayer, the author of numerous foundational and insightful works published about the antebellum American circus and menagerie.

Eligibility Criteria Nominations can be for pub-

lished materials in any printed form including books, articles, pamphlets, etc., as well as original works contained in a digital format on a disk or loaded on a permanent website. Eligibility details can be found on the CHS website.

Deadline Nominations must be submitted no later than February 20, 2019. The prize will be awarded during the 2019 convention in Sarasota.

Send Nominations to: Niles F. Calhoun
19 Sylwood Place
Jackson MS 39209

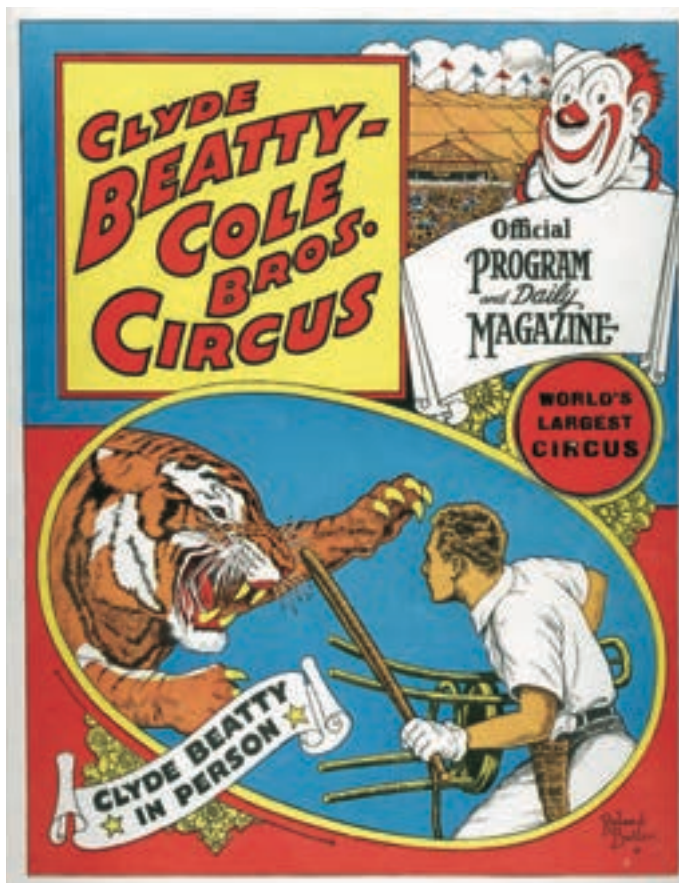
From the Editor

I was eleven years old. Although I had seen many other circuses, this time the experience left an impression on me like no other. My dad drove the two of us to Burlington, Iowa to see the Clyde Beatty Cole-Bros. Circus. The afternoon performance was a packed house. Early that hot July evening we observed the midway activities and then watched the show again in the magical atmosphere of the nighttime big top lighting. That day was the first time I saw “the world’s foremost subjugator of black-maned African lions and royal Bengal tigers.” We stayed for most of the tear down, and then around midnight we fell in behind an elephant truck and followed it to the next stand. I will never forget the elephant tubs hanging on the back of the semi-trailer and an occasional tip of a trunk emerging from a side vent window.

We were on the road with a circus! After a few hours of sleep in the back seat of the family car, I woke up to the clanking of the stake driver on the new lot in Sterling, Illinois. We saw the entire set up, and again both performances. By the end of day two, I was getting to know the 1962 performance pretty well. What a show it was. Not only did it include the incomparable Clyde Beatty, but also aerial star La Norma, the world-class Flying Gaonas, and a human projectile billed as “Captain Astronaut.”

Thus began several summers of sojourns across three Midwest states to see the “World’s Largest Circus.” It seemed as though each new edition of Beatty-Cole was bigger and better than ever. Other great acts joined the show – Greta Frisk on the swinging trapeze, Carla Wallenda on the high wire, and the Cristiani riding act billed as the Franconi Family.

Remembering those childhood circus-day icons led me to thinking about the star-spangled authors featured in this, the last issue of *Bandwagon* for 2018. Chris Berry steps into the sawdust ring and looks back exactly 100 year ago to the landmark season of 1918. In his rich journalistic style, Chris brings to life the important events of that turning-point year in circus history.



Illinois State University Milner Library provides two ring displays that feature photographic treasures from its Special Collections. Maureen Brunsdale has selected images taken by Sverre Braathen that underscore the breath of his magnificent photography. In a companion presentation, Mark Schmitt introduces us to never-before-seen photographs taken by Henry Ringling North – pictures that confirm that North too had an artistic eye for scenes of the circus he helped to run.

I did not know that Alfred Court began performing as an acrobat, even trouping with the Ringling Bros. show

more than two decades before he came back to the United States with all sorts of wild animals. Dominique Jando traces Court’s brilliant career, casting new light on the famous circus star.

Next is another carefully researched article by Chris Berry who points out the historic significance of the year 1968 for the American circus and how exactly 50 years ago Irvin Feld set a new course for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

And in the last article of this issue, we learn more about one of the most legendary clowns of the 20th century through his own words, as Lou Jacobs visited with Dan Draper in a 1989 interview.

I profoundly appreciate the work of all of our authors this past year, and as Editor I call them back to the center ring for one last bow: Chris Berry, Pete Shrake, David Saloutos, Dominique Jando, Dr. Gérard Borg and Dr. Jeanne-Yvonne Borg, Steven Richley, Joel Parkinson, Vanessa Toulmin, Al Stencell, Julie Parkinson, Jennifer Lemmer Posey, Maurine Brunsdale, Mark Schmitt and Dan Draper. Thank you for your superb and truly enlightening articles. And to this internationally acclaimed cast of stars let me add and again acknowledge the essential work of

Fred Dahlinger, John Wells and Mardi Wells in producing the Circus Historical Society journal.

To those of you in the audience, we pledge to continue to bring you the “wonders and innovations” of our beloved history subject. Beyond our promise of “bigger and better,” we sincerely hope that past and future *Bandwagons* will spark your own memories of joyous circus days gone by. We are always scouring the globe for new articles and ideas.

Thank you for being “on the road” with *Bandwagon*.



IN DAYS OF OLD: THE LANDMARK SEASON OF 1918

by Chris Berry

BARNUM
&
BAILEY CIRCUS.
TAKEN AT SEATTLE WASH.

One hardly knows where to commence, so many happenings and so unusual the season that it will go down in circus history as the most eventful and surprising...

—Fletcher Smith, *New York Clipper*, December 25, 1918

As American circuses limped into winter quarters at the end of 1917, the future of outdoor entertainment was very much in doubt.¹ During Barnum & Bailey's engagement at Madison Square Garden the previous April, the United States had declared war on Germany, and in the months that followed the mobilization intensified and the nation's railroads and workforce became increasingly strained. Locomotives that had once transported brightly painted parade wagons were now coupled to troop trains, shipping the matériel of war from coast to coast.

It has been said that civilization changed forever in 1918, and metaphorically, the American circus did too. The innocence that had existed during the Victorian era vanished in carnage that claimed some 20 million lives "over there." On the battlefields of Europe, horses were traded for tanks, and

machine guns replaced sabers, foreshadowing the mechanization and modernization of the circus. When influenza swept across the country, traveling shows that had long been welcomed in villages and towns were shunned because of the threat of disease carried by outsiders and the crowds that they attracted.

If 1918 was the beginning of a new era in world history, it was also a defining year for the American circus.

Shortly after the U.S. entered World War I, it became apparent that the nation's railroads were inadequate to serve the war effort, and on December 26, 1917 President Woodrow Wilson nationalized the railroads, putting the government in charge of every mile of track and each locomotive and box car owned by the nation's private railway companies. Every engineer, brakeman and conductor now took his orders from Washington. Even the railyards and terminals were under total control of the federal government.² As the new year began, the *New York Clipper* questioned whether circuses that operated their own private trains would be classified by the government as non-essential and whether railroads would refuse to transport the shows.³

RINGLING BROS



NEW
GORGEOUS SPECTACLE
IN DAYS OF OLD
A COLOSSAL PRODUCTION OF ROMANCE AND CHIVALRY

In 1918, the Ringlings produced a new spectacle set in Medieval times. The lavish production would be the last of its kind, and it was only staged for one season.

Circus World Museum



This striking three-sheet lithograph was produced by the Strobridge Lithograph Company to promote the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth during its final season.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

The future was so uncertain that in early January 1918, both the Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. circuses were still undecided whether they would tour that season at all, a situation made more challenging by the fact that expenses continued to mount while the shows were in winter quarters with the animals "all requiring a great amount of food, which is in itself scarce."⁴

The Billboard of February 9, 1918 reported that William McAdoo, Director-General of the railroads (and son-in-law of President Wilson), announced there would be no specific restrictions against circuses and carnivals, however, transportation of the tools of war and the raw material to produce them were to be given preference. The decision affected about 350 shows that traveled by rail, including carnivals, dramatic productions and vaudeville troupes.⁵

A letter to the National Outdoor Showmen's Association outlined the government's position.

"It is not the intention of the Director-General to interfere unnecessarily with legitimate amusements within which category certainly fall clean outdoor shows...you know that the railway lines leading to the Atlantic seaboard are very badly congested. For this reason, it is felt that circuses and other outdoor amusement enterprises requiring special trains and special equipment should not book their routes for the coming season in the congested district unless by special authorization of the regional directors."⁶

Despite the assurances that show trains would be accommodated in areas not choked by overcrowded rail corridors, as the season approached there was still no firm commitment from the government. John Ringling, a railroad owner himself, went to Washington to consult with transportation officials and there were even reports that the Ringlings were, for the first time, offering to supply their own locomotives to move their big shows.⁷

Meanwhile, the press office at Barnum & Bailey winter quarters never stopped humming. About a month before the show opened at Madison Square Garden, a correspondent from the *Boston Post* visited Bridgeport where he reported that it was business as usual. "The war, you know, is not going to interfere with us in any way," Treasurer Charles Hutchinson told the reporter. "While some circuses are not going out, I have assurances from the government that our show, the big show which the boys and girls of New England look for, will be transported."⁸

During his tour in Bridgeport, the reporter was also shown how the circus was complying with directives to save food and critical resources. Animal su-



The Coop & Lent Circus transitioned from rail to trucks for the 1918 season. It is considered the first fully motorized circus.

Circus World Museum



The Coop & Lent motorized circus was about the size of a 20-car rail show, and included sleepers, horse vans and parade wagons on truck chassis. The Great Wallace bandwagon was mounted on a truck that pulled a wagon containing four small elephants.

Circus World Museum



Coop & Lent carried four small elephants and about 30 head of ring stock. Although a menagerie had originally been planned, the idea was soon scrapped.

Circus World Museum

perintendent John Patterson said that even the menagerie was doing its part. "We do observe the Hoover regulations and have a meatless day," he said. "It comes on Sunday when the man-eaters don't get fed at all. Once a day, six days a week they eat meat. Tons of it. But Sundays are meatless."⁹

In April, with the outdoor season just weeks away, the owners of all of America's big railroad circuses met in New York for six days to hammer out a plan that would be accepted by the government. The suggestions were presented to railroad officials, and most of the requested itineraries were accepted.¹⁰

Charles Ringling said that even if the circus lost money in 1918, it would still tour to keep up morale on the home front. "...we feel that we owe the government and have a mission to perform for the public," Ringling told a reporter. "During our road season we will collect thousands of dollars in war taxes on admissions, and we will perform the all-important mission of relieving the tension and depression of wartime."¹¹

In the uncertain days before the Railroad Administration made its ruling, there were na-

tional news stories that several big shows might take to trucks for the season including John Robinson, Hagenbeck Wallace, Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros.¹² According to *The Billboard*, an automobile salesman who caught wind of the idea traveled 1,000 miles to Baraboo to meet with the Ringlings in hopes of securing the contract. Upon arriving at the circus offices, he was asked if his trucks could provide accommodations for 1,200 employees, plus extra-long wagons to carry the show's six center poles. The automobile dealer then realized what several hundred trucks would do to the average country road in the middle of the night, "and the proposition did not look so feasible."¹³

Even though a Ringling-owned truck circus was not practical, Barnum & Bailey did carry its first gasoline powered vehicles on the 1918 circus train. Three early trucks, at least one of them a Knox winch vehicle and another a Mack AC, were carried on the train that season.¹⁴

Whether it was the fear of railroad delays or a confidence in the improved vehicles and their ability to maneuver the rural highways, the Coop & Lent railroad circus traded its flat cars and coaches at the start of the season for a totally motorized operation built by the Service Motor Company of Wabash, Indiana. The show, which had been purchased in a bankruptcy sale by Isaac S. Horne and Robert M. Harvey, invested \$20,000 in what would be the first circus to transition from rail to highways.¹⁵



The Mighty Haag Circus converted to overland operations in 1918. This ticket, printed during the show's railroad era, was still being used in 1918.

Circus World Museum

THE WALTER L. MAIN

FASHION PLATE SHOWS

TYRONE, SAT., APRIL 27

PARADE 12.30, NOON



**WAIT FOR
A REAL SHOW**
IT COSTS
NO MORE

**THE ONLY BIG
RESPONSIBLE
SHOW
COMING**

A SHOW OF SUPREMELY-STUPENDOUS SURPRISES

Every Act A Feature and Every Feature A Thrill!

PRESENTED ABSOLUTELY AND ALWAYS ON HONOR

A PEERLESS PROGRAM OF PRE-EMINENT PERFORMERS

Everything New, Novel, Costly and Convincing. An Honest Show Conducted on Up-to-date Lines.

Earth's Most Marvelous Amusement Enterprise. The Real Stars of the Circus Firmament.

Every Promise to the Public Unfailingly Fulfilled

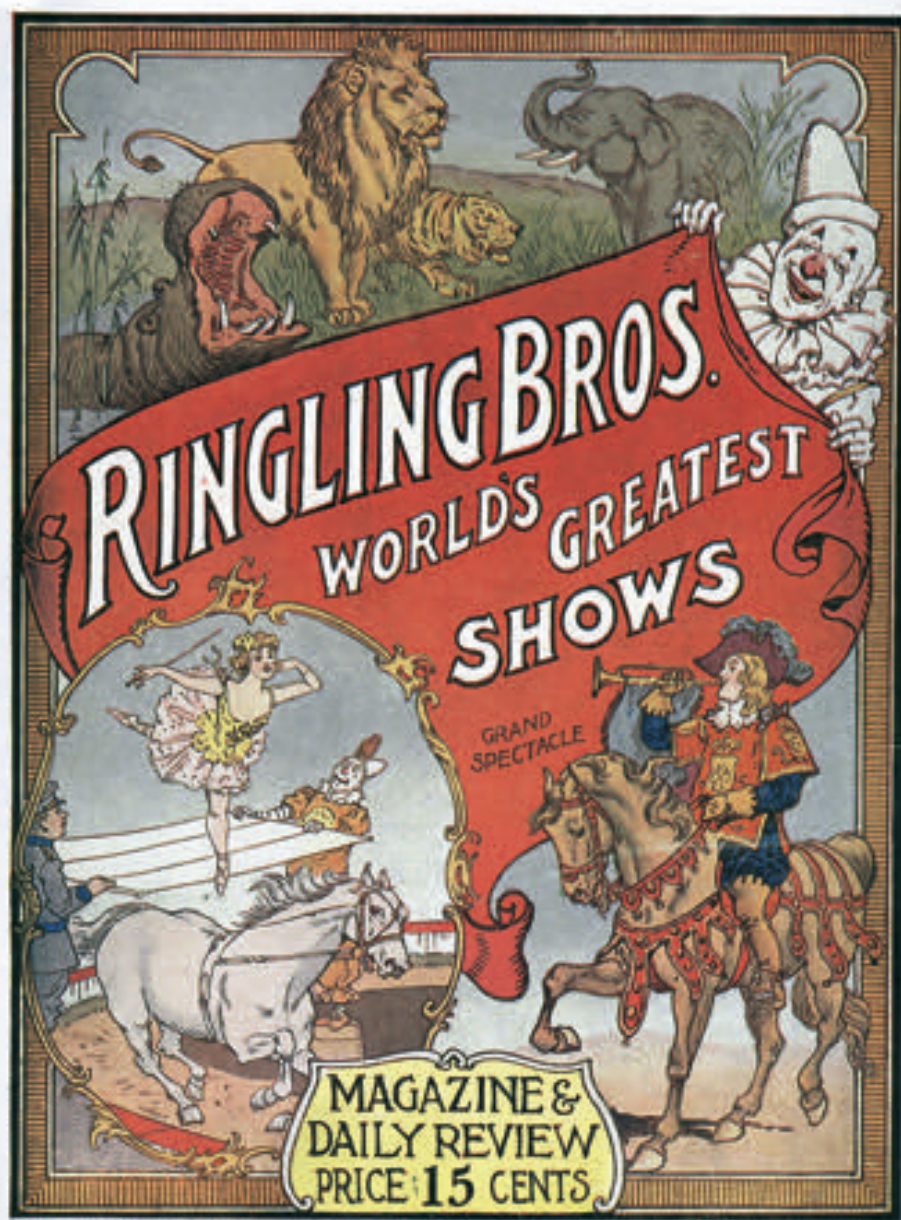
FREE TO ALL—ONE MILE OF MAGNIFICENT PARADE—

NOON DAY OF SHOW

2 PERFORMANCES DAILY, Afternoon and Night. Doors Open at 1 and 2. Performance One Hour Later.

In 1918 the Walter L. Main Fashion Plate Shows returned to Tyrone, Pennsylvania 15 years after a devastating train wreck. In 1893, 14 of the circus's railroad cars derailed near Tyrone, killing five workers along with dozens of animals.

Chris Berry Collection



The program of the Ringling Bros. Circus in 1918 featured some of the greatest stars of the 20th century, including May Wirth, Lillian Leitzel, Alf Loyal and Hillary Long.

Circus World Museum

On May 25 Coop & Lent opened the season to huge crowds on Chicago's South Side at the corner of 115th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue,¹⁶ but as soon as the trucks left the paved roads of the city they immediately began to experience problems.¹⁷ A typical story played out in mid-summer when the circus was billed to play Zanesville, Ohio on Friday July 26 but did not arrive until Monday the 29th. The delay was blamed on accidents enroute along with inexperienced truck drivers. After the show arrived in Zanesville, it was delayed even longer as it took several more days to repair the damaged trucks.¹⁸

Although the Coop & Lent truck circus was only on the road for about ten weeks, closing in late August, its route

took it through Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio. Despite the many obstacles it faced, showmen at the time recognized that opportunities existed for motorized circuses, and Coop & Lent was used as a model for many of the early truck shows that followed.¹⁹

In 1917, show owner Lucky Bill Newton first experimented with trucks pulling wagons, and for the new season he and his son Bill Newton, Jr., consolidated their operations as a single truck show with the title of Honest Bill's America's Best Shows Combined with Lucky Bill's Big Wagon Show. Still, the lack of paved roads and unreliable vehicles forced the circus to miss too many towns along its rural Kansas tour, and in 1919, the show returned to mule teams to move its caravan of wagons.²⁰

Ernest Haag was another circus owner who was still depending on wagons in 1918. The Mighty Haag Show toured Louisiana and Texas that season. Among the performers in the troupe were Myrtle Maybelle James, her husband and bandmaster Everett and their two-year-old son and future big band leader Harry James.²¹

Despite the option of using trucks, most circuses, large and small, opted to continue their dependence on the railroads, even though some show owners such as Charles Sparks seriously considered taking to the highways.²²

Sparks and Andrew Downie shared many of the same philosophies related to circus management and both continued to plan for a big season. In mid-February, Downie made a deal with

Walter L. Main to re-title his La Tena Three-Ring Wild Animal Shows, which had toured in 1917. Reports said that the Downie-owned Walter L. Main Circus would be transported on 18 railroad cars and would open its season April 20 in its winter quarters hometown of Havre de Grace, Maryland.²³

As Downie's carpenters, painters and blacksmiths were preparing his show just a short distance from Chesapeake Bay, similar craftsmen hired by Al G. Barnes were doing the exact same thing to circus wagons and equipment on the shores of the Pacific. The Barnes circus of 1918 traveled on 30 cars, opening in Santa Monica under sunny skies and traveling up the west coast on a tour that would take it as far east as Illinois and as far south as Louisiana.



27-year-old Bird Millman marked her 5th season with Barnum & Bailey in 1918. When she was not traveling with the circus she was a featured vaudeville act in both Europe and the United States.

Tegge Circus Archives

Other big shows that maneuvered around the rail restrictions at the start of the season included Sells-Floto, John Robinson and Hagenbeck Wallace, which was delivering a slimmed down performance compared to previous years, with only 16 displays compared to an average of 19 or 20 during its most recent seasons.

It was not just a shortage of acts that was apparent on the Hagenbeck Wallace showgrounds. The lack of qualified working men during its two-day opening stand in Cincinnati was an omen of things to come as the show owned by Ed Ballard struggled to set up and parade during a downpour. Yet despite an inadequate labor force and unfavorable weather, the tent was packed on the second day of the stand,

with all proceeds going to the War Bond campaign.²⁴

Weather was not a factor for the Ringling circus that again opened its season indoors at the Chicago Coliseum on April 20. Among those on hand at every matinee performance in Chicago were 100 sailors from the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, given free tickets to see the circus as a morale booster.²⁵

While the show was at the Coliseum circus fans had the opportunity to buy Liberty Bonds in addition to popcorn and peanuts. It was reported that one team of women who went into the circus dressing rooms to sell bonds “cleaned up,” and when they made their way to clown alley, nearly every “Joey” on the show bought a bond.²⁶

The Ringling Bros. *World's Greatest Shows* of 1918 featured some of the great circus stars of the 20th century in a performance that was characterized by a youthful exuberance. Among the stars, 23-year old May Wirth, who thrilled audiences by somersaulting from one galloping horse to another, and 26-year old Lillian Leitzel who was at the peak of her career, performed high in the dome of the big top. Other featured acts on the Ringling Bros. circus included Alf Loyal and his trained dogs and a group of authentic Australian woodchoppers who demonstrated their skill as lumberjacks. Others highlighted in the program included Hillary Long, the man who “walked” on his head.

The Ringling Bros. spectacle for 1918 was titled “In Days of Old,” and was written and arranged by Charles

Ringling. The medieval-themed spec featured 38 principal characters, and among those in key roles were equestrian director John Agee as Sir Valiant, George Hartzell, “The Children’s Favorite Clown,” as King Resolute, Jennie Rooney as Princess Rosalind and Tillie Bartik as Prince Placid.²⁷

As Ringling Bros. was packing the Coliseum in Chicago, Barnum & Bailey was back at New York’s Madison Square Garden with a performance that was heavy on riding acts, including the Davenports, the Hannefords, and the midget clown/equestrian Signor Bagonghi. Other headliners in the 1918 performance included Bird Millman on the tight wire, along with the Siegrist-Silbon troupe and the Clarkonians trapeze act featuring Ernest Clarke and his triple somersault.



John and Mabel Ringling were seen regularly on the Barnum & Bailey lot in 1918. While John was responsible for managing *The Greatest Show on Earth*, Charles Ringling performed the same duties on *The World's Greatest Shows*.

Circus World Museum

The spec was "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp," a repeat of the same pageant that had been featured in 1917.²⁸

The music for the 1918 edition of *The Greatest Show on Earth* was arranged and conducted by composer and bandmaster Karl L. King in his final season with the show. The 45-piece band presented a half-hour concert prior to a performance which no doubt featured his iconic circus march, "Barnum & Bailey's Favorite."²⁹

Barnum & Bailey billed itself as "The Circus of All Nations" in 1918 and used the slogan to promote the fact that more than 20 different nationalities were represented in the performance. The international theme was obvious as soon as the show would arrive in a new town, as each of the countries and regions were promoted in a special section of the street parade. The Orient was represented by Chinese and Arabs, the Russian section featured Cossack riders, and war-

time allies France and England were represented by "scores of performers of all kinds." There was also a wild west section made up of "rough riders, cowboys, lasso experts and bronco busters."³⁰

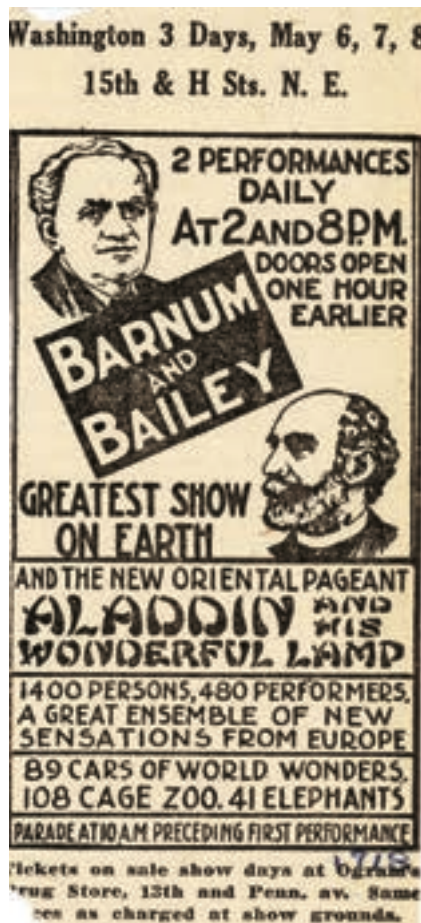
Despite "The Circus of All Nations" billing, one country that was not embraced by the public was Germany. The anti-German sentiment was so pervasive in the spring of 1918 that as Barnum & Bailey was preparing to leave New York for its tour under canvas, 30 German performers were told they would have to post \$1,000 bond before they would be allowed to leave the city. Attorney John M. Kelley, counsel for the Ringling interests, immediately went to Washington where he worked out details for the rest of the season. The performers were permitted to open the tented season in Brooklyn, though they were kept under surveillance by the U.S. Marshals Service.³¹

The negative feeling many Americans had toward Germans was characterized by the pressure placed on Emil Pallenberg, whose bears had been a feature on the show since 1915. Shortly after the circus left Madison Square Garden, the name Pallenberg was shortened to Pallen in promotional material, evidently because it sounded "too German." From that point on newspapers would describe the act under its new name of Pallen's Bears.³²

It was no surprise that the international nature of circus troupes attracted the scrutiny of Federal Marshals who were on the lookout for spies and "enemy aliens." When Hagenbeck Wallace and Ringling Bros. played Rochester and Buffalo, New York, early in the season, officials reported that Hagenbeck Wallace was carrying "14 enemy aliens in its employ...while Ringling Bros. has 18."³³ And it was not just the big shows that were affected by the travel restrictions. Fritz Brunner, a German animal trainer for Sparks World Famous Shows, was also told that he could not leave winter quarters in Ohio. It was only after Charles Sparks went to court to prove that he was needed to care for a newly born camel that he was permitted to stay with the show.³⁴

Still it was not only the foreign performers who were being scrutinized by authorities. Traveling circuses were considered by authorities to be a safe harbor for draft dodgers, and when Barnum & Bailey was in Philadelphia, government agents raided the lot after the matinee on May 2 arresting 52 workers including canvasmen, stake drivers and cookhouse waiters. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "agents began questioning every suspicious looking individual in sight." If a worker could not prove he had complied with the draft law and obtained an exemption, he was arrested.³⁵

The raids did not just happen in the big cities. For example, when Barnum & Bailey was in Akron, Ohio, 150 workers were taken into custody, and the next day 30 of them who had been unable to provide evidence of their draft standing were immediately taken by armed guard to a nearby army camp and pressed into military service.³⁶



President Woodrow Wilson was among those who visited Barnum & Bailey during a three day stand in Washington. Circus World Museum

department heads, “and while we need the help badly, the government needs them worse, and the Ringling show is not going to retain anyone who should be serving Uncle Sam, not if we know it.” He added, “We are not going to let slackers hide under our flatcars and tents, day or night, or anytime.”³⁷

The Ringlings also continued their support of the war effort by allowing the army to set up recruiting tents on the showgrounds.³⁸ In addition, advance cars for the shows carried recruiting posters for the Navy along with lithographs for the circus. Billposters would place Uncle Sam in the same store window as Poodles Hanneford, a public service that was started shortly after the United States went to war.³⁹

A patriotic spin was also used when the John Robinson show arrived in Asheville, North Carolina as advance man George C. Moyer told a reporter how the circus was evolving to meet the challenge of moving the show every day under wartime constraints. “Perhaps no enterprise in the United States has felt the hardships of the world’s war as keenly as the circus business, yet we are going along with a smile, and praying that Uncle Sam’s boys will soundly thrash the Germans,” said Moyer. “We are sending every man we

The appearance of government agents became a daily occurrence on circus lots from coast to coast, and in response to the ongoing arrests, the Ringling press agents took a proactive position. Articles began appearing a few days prior to the show’s arrival promoting the fact that the circus would not employ “slack-ers,” and was aggressive in turning them over to local draft boards. Newspapers spread the story that Charles Ringling had visited the lot where he asked for the personnel histories of every draft-age man on the shows, and 50 had been turned over to authorities. “They seemed to me like slackers,” Ringling reportedly told his

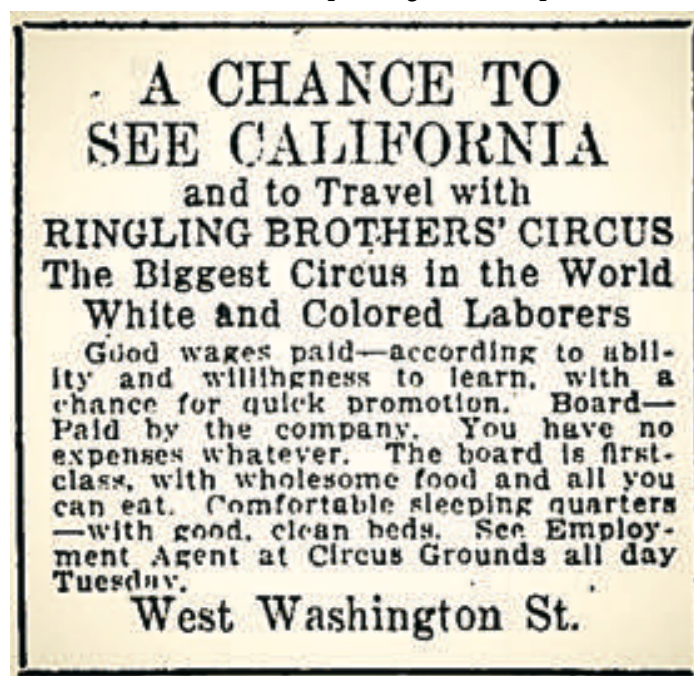
can to the front,” he added, and detailed how the war had forced mechanization on the traveling circus, with tractors pulling wagons, and a stake driver that “easily does the work of 50 husky men.”⁴⁰

Despite efforts to seize the initiative and avoid bad publicity, the raids continued. In Des Moines, Iowa for example, 125 draft dodgers were arrested as Ringling Bros. arrived on the morning of August 5. Over the next several days Ringling’s street parades and performances were canceled in several cities because of a lack of manpower.⁴¹ Government agents also swooped down on the Hagenbeck Wallace lot in Stevens Point, Wisconsin four days later and arrested another 150 workingmen just before the circus trains left that night for Portage.⁴²

Patriotic fervor was at a fever pitch when Barnum & Bailey’s trains unloaded in Washington for its annual engagement at 15th and H Streets in Northeast D.C. As President Woodrow Wilson approached the lot to attend an evening performance on May 7, the flags of the United States, France and England flew from every pole, and the elephants carried huge placards reading “Eat More Potatoes” as a special favor to Herbert Hoover who was serving as the wartime Food Administrator.⁴³

President and Mrs. Wilson arrived early and had plenty of time to look over the menagerie, and as the Presidential party entered the Big Top, Karl King led the band in playing “The Star-Spangled Banner” as a large American flag was unfurled over the aerial rigging.

An unidentified circus press agent told reporters that as



Manpower shortages forced circuses to aggressively advertise for laborers during World War I. Although this ad from the Indianapolis Star promises a trip to California, the Ringling Bros. Circus of 1918 never made it any further west than Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Chris Berry Collection



Left, although a special war tax was imposed on circus tickets in 1918, Al G. Barnes paid the tax himself rather than adding it to the cost of admission, a fact that was frequently picked up by local newspapers.

Circus World Museum

nationwide, the following exchange occurred between an usher and the President:

“Beg pardon, Mr. President, but I will have to collect the war tax from you.”

“How much,” asked the President.

“Fifteen cents,” said the circus man.

“Keep the change,” said the President, handing the circus man either a quarter or half dollar.

“I’m not permitted,” said the usher and he handed back the change.

Whereupon the President pocketed it and went

the President took his seat he must have forgotten about the war tax that had been imposed on tickets to all entertainment events. According to dispatches carried in newspapers



Several circuses transformed their elephants into “soldiers” during World War I. This photograph of the Barnum & Bailey war elephants rehearsing at Madison Square Garden was taken by Frederick W. Glasier.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

back to eating peanuts.⁴⁴

The President stayed for the entire performance, including the after-show concert, and during the evening, he filled the floor of his box with peanut shells.⁴⁵ After the show ended, the capacity crowd cheered as President Wilson and his party left the tent.⁴⁶

The mandatory war tax on tickets did create a burden on show owners, and although most of them added the fee to the normal ticket price, one owner, Al G. Barnes, elected to pay the tax himself and reap the benefit of the associated publicity. Approximately every 15 days Barnes would reportedly pay approximately \$3,500 in war ticket taxes out of his own pocket, a fact that was frequently picked up by local newspapers.⁴⁷

As spring turned into summer, millions of men had either been drafted into the military or hired into well-paid industrial jobs creating a tremendous manpower shortage, described by Fletcher Smith of the *New York Clipper* in his review of the season, "Everybody was called upon to do extra labor and to the credit of the troupers there were no slackers. I can call to mind one show that had for its stake-pulling gang for the entire season, its treasurer and part owner, press agent, calliope player, advertising solicitor and one kinker."⁴⁸

By the time Ringling Bros. reached Marshalltown, Iowa on August 3 the show was down 250 men from its normal complement of workers, and the service flag that flew on the lot that day was made up of 568 stars, each representing a circus employee who had traded his sledgehammer or juggling clubs for a rifle. Because of the labor shortage, the circus would only parade on days when trains arrived on time, and with fewer men moving wagons from the lot to the railyards after the evening performances, departures were frequently delayed creating a domino effect the next morning.⁴⁹

American circuses felt the impact of the war each morning as its trains were unloaded. When Sells-Floto arrived in Alliance, Nebraska on Sunday July 21, 1918, a group of 34 local boys were leaving for the army. Because coincidentally the circus was in town, someone had the idea to enlist the circus band to march with the young men to the local depot and play patriotic tunes as the train was arriving. When the time came for the musicians to strike up an appropriate march, the circus band refused unless they received \$25. A committee of local leaders was outraged. Not only did they refuse to pay the circus musicians, they distributed a circular that questioned the patriotism of Sells-Floto and urged the citizens of the town to "govern themselves accordingly." According to the local newspaper, the circular worked, and



A number of circuses provided charity performances to benefit the Red Cross in 1918. Additionally, women like these on Barnum & Bailey, provided other valuable support for the War effort.

Circus World Museum

the next day “many stayed away who might have otherwise gone to the show.”⁵⁰

It was not just farm boys and roustabouts who were being turned into soldiers. The draft also caught up with several circus owners and executives, and at the end of the 1917 season, 28-year-old George Christy received his notice. In an interview published in the May-June 1996 issue of *Bandwagon*, Christy told of being forced to sell his two-car Christy Hippodrome Shows and of the uncertainty that he faced, not knowing what his future would be. “I had to sell that show quickly, and I did for peanuts to Elmer Jones,” Christy said.

“I took my suitcase and boarded a steam ship for Key West and on to Philadelphia and a visit home, before going to the Junction, Kansas military camp to start my training, with the promise of a Major’s commission in the Quartermasters Corps. I got off in Key West and wired my father. He quickly replied saying that he just received word that I was to ignore the call. No circus and no commission either. So, my wife and I figured nothing else to do but take a vacation.”⁵¹

With seemingly no responsibility and no longer a circus owner, Christy saw an advertisement for a two-car dramatic show that was for sale in Iowa. After contacting the owner, he made a deal and opened “Christy’s Tent Show” near Omaha on June 15. He successfully completed the 1918 season which took the small show into the Rocky Mountains before returning home to Texas. After regrouping at his Houston winter quarters, Christy was back on the road in 1919, proof that adversity can create opportunity.⁵²

Other show owners who were drafted included Bill Newton, Jr., known for his Honest Bill circus which had begun touring in 1909. Honest Bill was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the navy on November 1. However, his military career was short-lived. Ten days later the armistice was signed, and he was discharged on November 16. It did not take him long to return to Kansas and resume managing the family owned circus.⁵³

Whether it was the manpower shortage, or the forward thinking of owner Al G. Barnes, in 1918 his circus became the first to employ a female press agent. Mrs. Emma Miller was traveling ahead of the show, and the mere novelty of having a woman promoting the circus was enough to generate additional publicity.⁵⁴ Among the stories that she pitched to local newspapers was the angle that because the animals on the Barnes show outnumbered the humans, their role in the construction of the circus each day was essential. As Mrs. Miller explained it, while conserving essential labor, Al G. Barnes had “arranged a performance that requires a minimum of manpower, depending largely on the animals of the show to furnish the amusement to the throngs that crowd the circus tent each day.”⁵⁵

OFFICIAL ROUTE CARD

HAGENBECK-WALLACE CIRCUS

SEASON 1918

GENERAL OFFICES, WEST BADEN, IND.

Date	City	State	R. R.	Miles
SUNDAY				
June 17	Port Huron	Mich.	G. T.	57
June 18	Pontiac	Mich.	G. T.	72
June 19	Ann Arbor	Mich.	G. T. & M. C.	62
June 20	Dowagiac	Mich.	M. C.	142
June 21	Michigan City	Ind.	M. C.	49
June 22	Hammond	Ind.	M. C.	36
SUNDAY				
June 24	Monroe	Wis.	Belt & C. M. & St. P.	54
June 25	Beloit	Wis.	C. M. & St. P.	49
June 26	Richland Center	Wis.	C. M. & St. P.	101
June 27	Prarie Du Chien	Wis.	C. M. & St. P.	71
June 28	Charles City	Iowa	C. M. & St. P.	90
June 29	Owatonna	Minn.	C. M. & St. P.	149

No. 7.

Total Miles to Date 3550

The Hagenbeck Wallace Circus was enroute to Wisconsin when tragedy struck early on the morning of June 22. After missing only two towns on the route, the circus caught up with its billing in Beloit, Wisconsin. Circus World Museum

The Al G. Barnes Wild Animal Circus of 1918 was truly that, as the performance featured no acrobats or bareback riders, with the focus instead on jungle performers. Not only did Mabel Stark wrestle a tiger, but other female trainers included Martha Florine who worked with leopards, and “Miss Venus Fashion” who appeared with male lions. Other animal acts included bear wrestling and performing seals, along with trained zebras and llamas and a patriotic number featuring “Red Cross Elephants.”⁵⁶

The idea of using elephants in a military display was also embraced by both Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. The elephant act on Ringling Bros. included a military scene where two of the largest elephants would take their positions on each side of the ring near regulation army rifles mounted on tripods. At a signal each fired at the other. One would fall and lie motionless as another elephant dressed as a Red Cross nurse and carrying a doctor bag would approach the

“wounded” elephant. The “nurse elephant” would then open the satchel and take a bottle of medicine and fan the prone elephant with a palm. Another elephant would then limp forward on three legs with a cane, as a fourth would vigorously wave the Stars and Stripes. The act was duplicated in all three rings and was the only reference to the war in the entire Ringling Bros. performance.⁵⁷

If the Ringling show was subtle in acknowledging the war under the big top, that was not the case in the backyard of the show where female performers formed a knitting club, and everyone was required to either knit scarves for the soldiers or pay up. Many of the men on the show formed their own club to buy yarn for the women.⁵⁸ In a stunt that garnered significant publicity during the season, many of the women would actually knit socks, sweaters and scarves while riding on wagons during the morning street parade.⁵⁹

From the largest shows to the smallest, circus owners embraced the patriotism that was sweeping the country. Charles Sparks did his part to support the war effort, giving space in the menagerie to the Red Cross to raise money when his show was in Salisbury, North Carolina in late September. The local chapter raised about \$150, with the largest single donation, \$25 being contributed by Sparks himself.⁶⁰

Other circuses that contributed to the Red Cross included the two-car Campbell Circus which opened the season in Drummond, Oklahoma and donated the entire receipts from its debut performance to the war effort.⁶¹

Although Annie Oakley had long since retired from the Buffalo Bill's Wild West, she was among those contributing to the Red Cross. During her sharpshooting exhibitions she

would offer spectators the opportunity to hide coins “above a quarter” anywhere on the showgrounds. If her dog “Dave” would find the money, it would be donated to the charity. During one exhibition in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the dog found \$1,625, with the entire sum donated to the war effort.⁶²

It was also about that time that “Little Miss Sure Shot” made headlines when she talked about the only time she regretted her accuracy with a gun. At an exhibition for a group of doughboys at Camp Meade, Maryland, Annie Oakley told the soldiers that during an 1890 performance with Buffalo Bill in Berlin, she shot the ashes off a cigarette that was held by Kaiser Wilhelm, the bombastic German emperor who had led his country into war. “Oh, how I wish he would let me try it now,” she said.⁶³

One of the challenges that many circuses faced in 1918 was the fact that in many towns the traditional circus lots where shows had set up for years were now planted with “war gardens.” With large open spaces at a premium, many shows had to set up cookhouses and horse tents on the lawns of homeowners who lived near the circus grounds. According to John Eberlie, boss canvasman for Sells-Floto, in many towns they could not get all of the tents on the same lot. Edward Wiley, Sells-Floto's 24-hour man, said that over an 18-day period the show set up on 17 lots that had never before hosted a circus.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the perception that circuses were harboring draft dodgers continued. “Some people are inclined to the erroneous view of the circus in these war times,” said M. E. Axell, press agent for Sells-Floto in an interview with the



The Hagenbeck Wallace Circus train had stopped outside of Hammond, Indiana when the engineer of the train that was following it fell asleep, splintering a caboose and four circus coaches.

Circus World Museum



Rescue efforts were hampered by a lack of water to extinguish the burning coaches and an enormous crowd at the scene.

Circus World Museum

Daily Tribune in Pratt, Kansas. Continuing, he said:

“We are not slackers by any means but are doing our part to help win the war. In operating during war times, we are following the wishes of those who oversee the affairs of government, who proceed on the well-established theory that ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.’ In these days when everyone is carrying an unusual load of responsibility it is more than ever necessary that some amusement be injected now and then to lighten the burden of care. This is the purpose which the Sells-Floto circus is endeavoring to serve. We bring into the lives of the people who are toiling feverishly to sustain the government through the war struggle a few moments of diversion, which enables them to return to their tasks with renewed interest and enthusiasm. Whenever the government decides it can serve the country better in some other way we are ready to put away our equipment and devote ourselves to such other tasks may be assigned us.”⁶⁵

By the summer of 1918, nearly four-million Americans were in uniform, both in Europe and stateside where troop trains shuttled soldiers and sailors to east coast ports and the ships that would transport them to the battlefields of France

and Belgium. Early on the morning of June 22, a troop train made up of 24 empty Pullman cars was returning to Chicago after discharging a group of new soldiers in Kalamazoo. The train was closely following the second section of the Hagenbeck Wallace circus train as it made its way from Michigan City to Hammond, Indiana.

At about 4:00 A.M. the circus train crew realized that an axle-bearing on one of the flat cars had overheated, creating a “hot box.” If not repaired the axle could break, causing a derailment or a fire. Although the engineer was able to pull most of the train onto a side track, several cars, including four sleepers and a caboose, were stopped on the main line about three miles east of Hammond, near the small community of Ivanhoe.⁶⁶

As the crew of the circus train was making repairs to the axle, flagmen were sent back to light warning flares. One of them, Oscar Timm, later testified that the troop train came upon him suddenly, and although he frantically signaled with his red light, he quickly realized that because of the speed of the train the engineer must have been sleeping. In a final desperate attempt to prevent a collision, Timm threw his lamp into the cab of the locomotive, yet still the train continued.⁶⁷

Those who witnessed the impact reported that the troop train was traveling at such a high rate of speed that it split



Members of The Flying Wards trapeze act were sleeping at the time of the crash. Jennie Ward Todd was among those killed in the wreck, and Engineer Alonzo Sargent was originally charged with her murder, the charge later reduced to manslaughter. (left to right, Jennie Ward Todd, Eddie Ward, Billie Summers, Mayme Ward, Alec Todd and Ernie Lane)

Illinois State University, Milner Library, Special Collections

through the caboose and four coaches” like a man shoves his finger into butter.”⁶⁸

The four coaches splintered, and the wooden rail cars immediately caught fire, killing dozens who were trapped in the wreckage. According to F. E. Bullard, the sleeping car superintendent, the wreck must have occurred at eleven minutes after four o’clock, as that was when his watch stopped.⁶⁹

Rescue workers and doctors from across Northwest Indiana were summoned to the scene and with no nearby source of water to fight the fire, it was 10:00 A.M. before the flames were extinguished. By then thousands of sight-seers were at the scene watching as workmen removed the remains of those who had been killed.

Because the first section of the circus had left Michigan City earlier in the evening, the canvas crew, tents and many of the wagons had already arrived in Hammond before the accident occurred. That morning many of the tents, including the cookhouse, horse top and menagerie were set up. There were tremendous crowds on the showgrounds at Calumet Avenue and 150th Street, but not to see a performance, as there was not one.⁷⁰

The survivors of the wreck met at the red and gold

trimmed ticket wagon where they registered and sought news of their fellow workers. Charles Gollmar, General Manager of the circus was there and made a statement to reporters:

“There are 600 people in our organization and of those 250 are performers. We are registering and checking up and there are 200 who are not accounted for, including those in the hospitals. I cannot estimate the number of dead. The greater portion of the dead were canvasmen and laborers, I believe. I am not in a position to make a statement at this time as to the loss of life because I have no means of knowing. The train was in two sections and the first section had six passenger coaches and the second four. There was only one coach of performers in the second section which was the one struck.”

Gollmar himself was sleeping in the second section of the train at the time of impact, and recounted his own personal experience:

“Mrs. Gollmar and myself were in our stateroom in the front end of the first passenger coach of the second section. We were in our bed when we awoke.

The roof was gone, and a man was thrown through the roof into our room by the force of the collision. The entire troop train had plowed through three coaches and to the center of the fourth. Those in the staterooms on our half of our coach were uninjured.”⁷¹

Among the performers on the train were artists from all over the world, including the Cottrelis and Meyers families, both equestrian acts; the Great Dierckx, a strong man act; Rosie Roseland, a bareback rider; and the Flying Wards trapeze act.

Edward Ballard, the owner of Hagenbeck Wallace, was traveling ahead of the show and had arrived in Hammond the previous night from Michigan City, otherwise, he too would have been on the wrecked train.⁷²

A century later there still is not a final number of how many were killed, however, it is believed that at least 86 people died and another 127 were injured on that beautiful summer morning. Fifty-six of victims were buried together in Showman’s Rest, a section of the Woodlawn Cemetery in the Chicago suburb of Forest Park, Illinois. The burial site was provided by the Showman’s League of America and funeral expenses were paid for by circus owner Ballard, who arranged to have the five identified bodies laid in separate graves and the others in one large grave.⁷³

Three days after the accident an attorney for the Michigan Central Railroad, Charles McFadden, reported to the press that Alonzo Sargent, the engineer of the troop train had been asleep, and did not see the danger signals. Gustave Klauss, the fireman on the train testified that he was busy shoveling coal until almost the moment of impact. Both the conductor and brakeman of the circus train testified that the danger flares were plainly visible against the clear sky.⁷⁴

Although dozens were killed in the wreck, Sargent was only charged in connection with one death. On April 15, 1919, the engineer went on trial on a capital murder charge in the death of 28-year old Jennie Ward Todd of the Flying Wards trapeze act. The Ward troupe had been in the last car of the train. In addition to Jennie Ward Todd, a newcomer to the act, Bessie Katrenke, was also killed. The others who made up the troupe, including Jennie’s husband Alec Todd, and Eddie and Mayme Ward, survived the crash.

During his court appearance, the engineer testified that at the time of the wreck he had been working without sleep for 22 hours. Evidence was presented that he was also taking medication that made him drowsy. As the jury was being given instructions prior to their deliberation, Judge M. J. Smith reduced the charge from murder to manslaughter, and after eight hours of deliberation the panel reported back that they were hopelessly deadlocked. The engineer was cleared of all charges and released.⁷⁵

Newspaper articles describing the trial make mention of the fact that many of those who were witnesses to the wreck

were unavailable to participate because of the transient nature of the circus. In fact, after missing only two days of performances, Hagenbeck Wallace caught up with its billing in Beloit, Wisconsin on June 25 and presented a show that included a number of new acts including several provided by Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. Of the 25 acts that had been on the program in Michigan City the day before the wreck, only one of them was presented unchanged, with the exact same group of performers.⁷⁶

As the weeks passed, Hagenbeck Wallace continued its tour, a wounded circus composed of acts that had been touched by tragedy, along with new performers who had joined after the train wreck. Then, on the morning of August 5, Advertising Car #1 returned to Hammond with a brigade of men who began billing the town for a second time, pasting lithographs on barns and placing posters in store windows. Hagenbeck Wallace was returning to the scene of the disaster, with two performances to be presented in Hammond on August 16.

Large crowds showed up in the rail yards to greet the trains that Tuesday morning, but once again it was not to be. Because of priority traffic on the Pennsylvania Railroad, the circus was forced to miss Hammond for the second time in two months.⁷⁷

In his review of the 1918 season in the *New York Clipper*, Fletcher Smith praised Hagenbeck Wallace owner Ed Ballard, saying that a less capable showman “would have been crushed,”⁷⁸ yet despite the tragedy, Ballard continued making big plans.

On Sunday September 19, Hagenbeck Wallace arrived in Chicago, the first circus in several years to parade in the Loop and set up in Grant Park.⁷⁹ Although the show was originally scheduled to play the lot at the foot of Harrison Street for 17 days, it closed after nine days of performances, yet still making an impressive showing. During the stand, Ed Ballard turned the ticket wagon over to the Stage Women’s War Relief, an organization that represented female entertainers.⁸⁰ Over 75,000 patrons attended the Chicago shows with every penny of the proceeds going to the charity.⁸¹

Despite the good crowds, Hagenbeck Wallace closed the season at the end of the Chicago stand, and on September 29, it moved immediately to its winter quarters in West Baden, Indiana. The losses from the season had been too much and Ed Ballard was forced into bankruptcy. On Christmas Day 1918, less than a week before his show went on the auction block, Ballard delivered a final performance in the circus’ hometown. The West Baden Springs hotel had been transformed into an army hospital, and on December 25, the staff and patients were treated to a sumptuous dinner and a circus performance under the building’s atrium. The

Right, the wreck was front-page news from coast to coast, with newspapers printing Extra editions as fresh details became known.

Chris Berry Collection

EXTRA

CHICAGO AMERICAN

BUSINESS MEN'S
EXTRA

TWO TRAINS WRECKED 21 DEAD MORE DYING

WOMAN WHO SOUGHT TO DIE HIDES IDENTITY

Rescued from the Lake by a
Tugboat, She Refuses to
Tell Her Name.

RESCUED FROM THE LAKE BY A
TUGBOAT, SHE REFUSES TO
TELL HER NAME.

When the woman was rescued from the lake by a tugboat, she refused to tell her name. She was found floating in the water near the city of Chicago. The woman was found by a tugboat captain who was out on patrol. She was brought to the shore and taken to a hospital. She is now recovering from her injuries. She has not yet been identified.

DIVORCE AND WEDDING COME FROM CHURCH CHOIR ROMANCE

CHICAGO STREET WOMAN GETS DIVORCE AND WEDS PAUL, RAYVILLE.



The woman, who was a member of a church choir, got a divorce and then married Paul, a man from Rayville. The marriage was a result of a romance that began in the church choir.

ALLEGED "BABY FARM" RAIDED

Police Found 1000 and 1000
Against Worst Suspects
Have Been Made

Police found 1000 and 1000 against worst suspects. The raid was conducted by police officers who were looking for evidence against several suspects.

LYNCHERS MUST BE PUNISHED

Lynchings must be punished. The article discusses the need for justice and the consequences of lynchings.

Two Sections of Wallace Brothers' Circus Train
Crash Together Near Detroit, Mich., Because
Air Brake Fails to Work—47 Those Injured
Several Are Expected to Die—Survivors Rattle
in Horror as "Circus Train" Rattles Along!

The circus train crash near Detroit, Michigan, resulted in 47 injuries and several deaths. The survivors are in a state of shock and horror.

OPENING QUOTATIONS:

Gold	100	100
Silver	100	100
Copper	100	100
Iron	100	100
Steel	100	100
Coal	100	100
Oil	100	100
Wheat	100	100
Corn	100	100
Soybeans	100	100
Cotton	100	100
Wool	100	100
Flax	100	100
Hemp	100	100
Linseed	100	100
Castor	100	100
Almond	100	100
Peanut	100	100
Sesame	100	100
Sunflower	100	100
Mustard	100	100
Turnip	100	100
Beet	100	100
Carrot	100	100
Onion	100	100
Potato	100	100
Sweet	100	100
Yam	100	100
Cassava	100	100
Manioc	100	100
Arrowroot	100	100
Cassia	100	100
Alumina	100	100
Antimony	100	100
Barium	100	100
Bismuth	100	100
Calcium	100	100
Chromium	100	100
Cobalt	100	100
Copper	100	100
Fluorine	100	100
Gold	100	100
Iron	100	100
Lead	100	100
Lithium	100	100
Magnesium	100	100
Manganese	100	100
Mercury	100	100
Nickel	100	100
Oxygen	100	100
Platinum	100	100
Potassium	100	100
Silver	100	100
Sodium	100	100
Sulfur	100	100
Tellurium	100	100
Tin	100	100
Tungsten	100	100
Vanadium	100	100
Zinc	100	100

DIES BY ACID BEFORE CROWD


The man died by acid before a crowd. The incident occurred in a public place, and the man was found dead.

ONLY BIG CIRCUS
to visit this section
of the state this season.

Beloit Tuesday
June 25

HAGENBECK
WALLACE
CIRCUS

\$3,000,000 INVESTED



\$7,500
DAILY
EXPENSE

1,000
PEOPLE

400
ARENIC
ARTISTS

3 GREAT TRAINS OF
CIRCUS MARVELS
INCLUDING SCORES OF
FOREIGN FEATURES
NEVER BEFORE SEEN IN AMERICA

3 R. R.
TRAINS

500
HORSES

BIGGEST
ZOO
ON EARTH

DOORS OPEN AT 1 AND 7 P. M.
Performances Begin at 2 and 8 P. M.
ONE TICKET ADMITS TO ALL
Children Under 10 Years Half Price

HAGENBECK WALLACE CIRCUS
will also exhibit at Monroe Monday
June 24.

1918

Above, when the tour resumed in Beloit just days after the tragedy, only one of the 25 acts on the program was presented with the same group of performers as prior to the wreck.

Circus World Museum

& Bailey set up its tents for a three-day stand at the White City Amusement Park on the city's South Side, and for the first time it staged a parade on the 63rd Street business corridor.⁸⁴

The Chicago engagement was not without controversy, however, as it coincided with a major coordinated raid of suspected draft dodgers on July 12. On that day over 4,000 Chicago police officers, soldiers and federal agents raided various locations in the city and arrested 10,000 men believed to be slackers. Among those taken into custody were 120 men who were on the Barnum & Bailey lot. As a result, the matinee performance was delayed for an hour.⁸⁵

program featured a lion act, a bareback rider and a performance by five elephants, along with clowns and boxing kangaroos.⁸²

Three days later, on December 28, a court-ordered sale took place in nearby French Lick. The two principal bidders were John Ringling and the partnership of Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers, owners of the John Robinson and Howes Great London circuses. Mugivan and Bowers were the high bidder at \$36,100 and at the end of the day they took home the entire circus, including the train, animals, baggage wagons, several hundred thousand sheets of lithographs, seats, lighting and harness for 220 head of horses.⁸³

Hagenbeck Wallace was not the only big show to play Chicago under canvas in 1918. In mid-July, Barnum

After leaving Chicago, Barnum & Bailey began heading west on a tour that included some of the longest jumps in the show's history. After closing in Cheyenne, Wyoming on August 17, the show traveled 500 miles to Salt Lake City, followed not long after with the longest jump of the season, a 683-mile, three-day trek from Portland, Oregon to Sacramento. Other exceptionally long jumps that summer included 329 miles over two days between Spokane and Seattle, and a 266-mile overnight hike between Dodge City, Kansas and Pueblo, Colorado in mid-August.⁸⁶

As Barnum & Bailey toured the west in August, Ringling Bros. was on a route that took it through the Great Plains, as Sells-Floto was in Iowa and Hagenbeck Wallace was touring Northern Illinois. The newspapers that summer were filled with war news as the Allies began a push that would ultimately lead to the armistice. Small items also began appearing in newspapers telling of young people dying of influenza. Doctors had been tracking the "Spanish flu" for several months, but wartime censors had kept the story from being reported. In August, the flu took hold and rapidly began spreading. By the time the pandemic ended in November, 675,000 Americans had died, and circuses were hit hard by the common fear of contracting the virus in big crowds.

Ringling Bros. started feeling the impact of the flu scare in September, and the further south the show traveled the more serious the situation became. As the show started billing South Carolina in September, Governor Richard Manning called on the State Board of Health to issue an order preventing the Ringling circus from touring the state.⁸⁷


Within days, shows across the country were told they were not welcome. In nearly every town circuses were quarantined, and townspeople were not allowed on the show grounds. It was not just outdoor entertainment that was hit hard by the epidemic. Vaudeville theatres and nickelodeons were closed nationwide. According to the *New York Clipper*, over 500 acts were affected during the second week of October.⁸⁸

In a few towns that did not quarantine, people were too afraid to come to the circus.⁸⁹

In Norfolk, Virginia, the John Robinson Ten Big Shows was not allowed to unload and quickly moved to Raleigh, North Carolina several days ahead of its billing in hopes of finding open territory. After missing six dates, owners Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers realized it was time to close and the staff was paid off in Charlotte, North Carolina on October 9.⁹⁰ The show was then shipped to Peru winter quarters, arriving on October 13.⁹¹

The Sparks circus was caught in Laurinburg, North Carolina with all towns in the region closed to entertainment. Fortunately for manager Charles Sparks, he was not far from his previous winter quarters in Salisbury, so he was able to send the show trains there.

In just a matter of days the season ended for virtually every circus. Yankee Robinson closed at Stuttgart, Arkan-



DATE	TOWN	STATE	R. R.	MILES
Aug. 12	Dodge City	Kansas	A. T. & S. F. Ry.	76
" 13	Pueblo	Colorado	"	266
" 14	Colorado Springs	"	"	45
" 15	Denver	"	"	73
" 16	Greeley	"	U. P. R. R.	52
" 17	Cheyenne	Wyoming	"	55
SUNDAY				
Aug. 19	Salt Lake City	Utah	U. P. and O. S. L. R. R.	520
" 20	Ogden	"	O. S. L. R. R.	37
" 21	Idaho Falls	Idaho	"	184
" 22	Butte	Montana	"	113
" 23	Missoula	"	N. P. Ry.	120
" 24	Spokane	Washington	"	257
SUNDAY				
Aug. 26	Seattle	Washington	G. N. Ry.	339
" 27	"	"	"	"
" 28	Bellingham	"	"	97
" 29	Everett	"	"	73
" 30	Tacoma	"	N. P. Ry.	85
" 31	Centralia	"	"	54
SUNDAY				
Sept. 2	Portland	Oregon	N. P. Ry.	91
" 3	En Route	"	"	"
" 4	En Route	"	"	"
" 5	Sacramento	California	S. P. Co.	683
" 6	Oakland	"	"	90
" 7	San Francisco	"	"	64
" 8	"	"	"	"
" 9	"	"	"	"

PERMANENT ADDRESS AND WINTER QUARTERS, BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

The 1918 tour took Barnum & Bailey from New York to Los Angeles. While traveling in the west, the circus had some of its longest jumps in show history.

Circus World Museum

sas on October 9 and moved to winter quarters in Granger, Iowa. Cole Bros. closed in Corinth, Mississippi, and a state-wide quarantine of Texas caught Gentry Bros., Al G. Barnes and the Christy Hippodrome Shows while they were touring there.

One of the earliest shows to head to winter quarters was Sells-Floto which closed in Walsenburg, Colorado on September 28. Andrew Downie shut down his Walter L. Main Circus a week ahead of schedule and shipped it from Tasley, Virginia to Havre de Grace, Maryland on October 8. All of those with the show were in good health until the show reached winter quarters when "The Governor," Andrew Downie collapsed, a victim of the flu. In a matter of days, however, he was back to supervising activities at the winter

quarters.⁹²

After a tour that took Sun Bros. from South Dakota to Georgia, the show ended its season with a six-day stand at the Southeastern Fair in Atlanta in mid-October. At the end of the engagement Sun Bros. was quarantined and not allowed to leave Atlanta. Pete Sun immediately took out an advertisement in *The Billboard*, and over the next several weeks he sold most of the property.⁹³

When Al G. Barnes arrived in Dallas on the morning of Sunday October 13, the show found that the city, like all others in the state was under a quarantine. Barnes connected his advertising cars and a private Pullman to a locomotive and left that day for home. The rest of the show arrived in Venice, California October 20.⁹⁴

Despite three days of cancellations in Charleston, Savannah and Jacksonville, Ringling Bros. still had to feed 1,200 employees. On the morning of October 7, while the show was in Jacksonville, Charles Ringling placed a notice on the front door of the cook house stating that the circus would close the next day in Waycross, Georgia. The note to the staff also said that for the first time the Ringling show would move to winter quarters in Bridgeport rather than Baraboo.⁹⁵

On October 8 the Ringling Bros. *World's Greatest Shows* gave

its final performance ever. Local officials in Waycross had tried to cancel the circus, however, a small crowd was on hand to see what would be the last show. After the performance ended, Charles Ringling went into the dressing tent and told the performers that he was not in a position to hire any of them for the next season. He also told them that he believed it was not practical to have two big circuses on the road in 1919, and if the Ringlings were able to put out a show the following spring it would be combined as Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.⁹⁶ The next day Charles Ringling paid off his employees, and before the trains left for Bridgeport, over 100 horses and ponies were sold to local residents at prices ranging from \$75 to \$175.⁹⁷

On the same day that Ringling closed in Waycross,



11, with “authorities of both cities canceling performances owing to the epidemic of influenza.”⁹⁸ With no hope of re-opening, *The Greatest Show on Earth* began the long trip to Bridgeport, with the only stops being when it was necessary to feed and water the animals.⁹⁹

On the same day that the Barnum & Bailey trains were leaving Houston, Henry Ringling, the youngest of the brothers, died of heart disease at his Baraboo home. He was 49. Although Henry was merely a child when the brothers began touring, he later became an important part of the organization. In 1898, the Ringlings leased the John Robinson Circus, and at the age of 28 he was put in charge of the show, later managing the Forepaugh-Sells Circus from 1905 until 1907.¹⁰⁰ It was reported that after Otto Ringling died in 1911 he bequeathed his shares in the circuses to Henry, making him a full partner.

Some circus historians have told the story that the death of Henry Ringling was the catalyst that allowed the two shows to combine at the end of the 1918 season, however, that appears unlikely. At the time of Henry Ringling’s death, the Ringling Bros. circus trains were already enroute to Bridgeport, arriving at its new winter quarters on the afternoon of October 14.¹⁰¹

One hundred years after the fact, questions about why

Left, Sells-Floto was one of the first shows to close early, giving its final performances of the season in Walsenburg, Colorado.

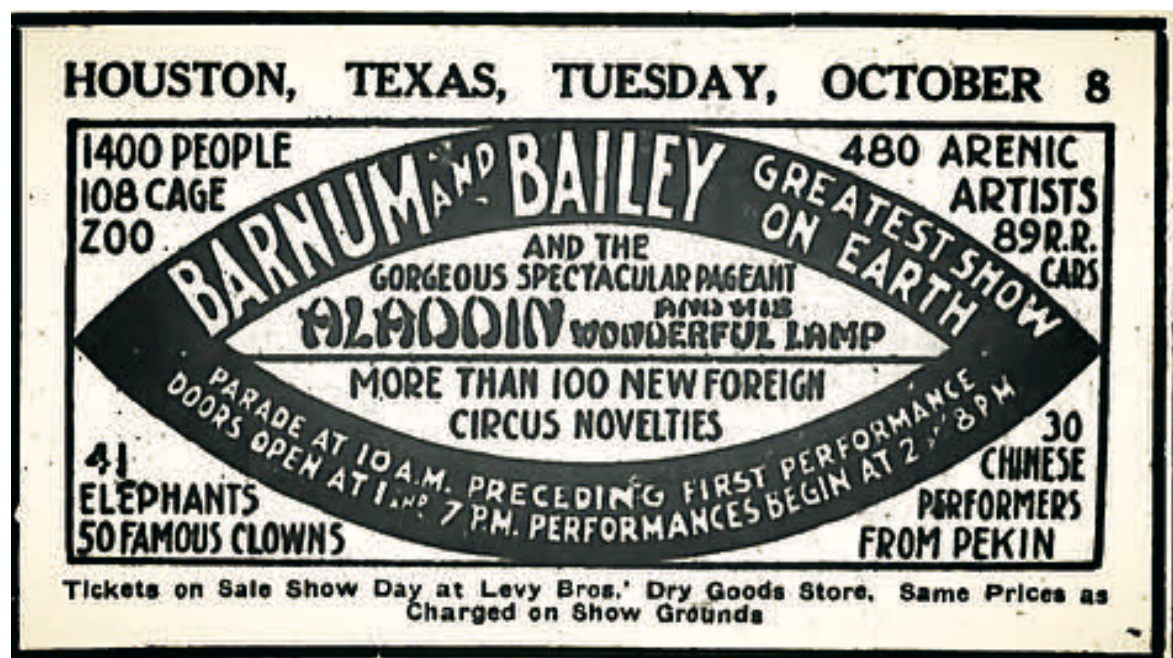
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Below, on the day Barnum & Bailey arrived in Houston, influenza had been detected in 77 Texas counties. Although the circus gave two performances to small crowds, the show was quarantined on the lot until October 11 when it was allowed to return to winter quarters.

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Barnum & Bailey arrived in Houston for its last date before being combined with Ringling Bros. By then influenza had been detected in 77 Texas counties, and at the recommendation of the U.S. Surgeon General, the Governor of Texas banned all public gatherings. Schools would also be closed “as well as places of amusement.”

Beaumont and Lake Charles, Louisiana were to have been the next stops for Barnum & Bailey, but the show remained in Houston until October



SEASON 1918				
				
OFFICIAL ROUTE				
ALLOW MAIL ENOUGH TIME TO REACH POINTS NAMED BEFORE DATE GIVEN. GENERAL OFFICES NO. 221 INSTITUTE PLACE, CHICAGO, ILL.				
DATE	TOWN	STATE	R. R.	MILES
Sept. 23	Birmingham	Alabama	L. & N. R. R.	208
" 24	Gadsden	"	Southern R. R. System	61
" 25	Chattanooga	Tennessee	"	87
" 26	Cartersville	Georgia	N. C. & St. L. Ry.	89
" 27	Atlanta	"	"	48
" 28	SUNDAY			
Sept. 30	Athens	Georgia	S. A. L. R. R.	73
Oct. 1	Augusta	"	Georgia R. R.	116
" 2	Columbia	S. Carolina	Sou. R. R. System	83
" 3	Sumter	"	A. C. L. R. R.	43
" 4	Charleston	"	"	93
" 5	Savannah	Georgia	"	115
" 6	SUNDAY			
Oct. 7	Jacksonville	Florida	S. A. L. R. R.	137
" 8	Waycross	Georgia	A. C. L. R. R.	75
" 9	Thomasville	"	"	103
" 10	Dothan	Alabama	"	92
" 11	Montgomery	"	"	119
" 12	Selma	"	W. R. R. of Ala.	50
" 13	SUNDAY			
Oct. 14	Meridian	Mississippi	Sou. R. R. System	104
" 15	Jackson	"	"	96
" 16	Greenwood	"	Y. & M. V. R. R.	98
" 17	Greenville	"	Sou. R. R. in Miss.	55
" 18	Clarksdale	"	Y. & M. V. R. R.	75
" 19	END OF SEASON			

The Spanish flu epidemic kept Ringling Bros. from performing in Charleston, Savannah and Jacksonville. The show closed in Waycross, Georgia and the circus trains were routed to the new winter quarters in Bridgeport.

Circus World Museum

Bridgeport was chosen over Baraboo remain. While it may have been the larger facility available in Connecticut, or easier access to railroads, almost as soon as the decision was announced, the state of Wisconsin and its tax structure became the villain.

As *The Billboard* explained it, "state authorities of Wisconsin have taxed the Ringling Brothers so heavily on their property in Baraboo that the brothers decided that inasmuch as the quarters at Bridgeport afforded ample shelter and conveniences for both of their shows, their interests might profitably be concentrated there." The article went on to say, "The rumor that there might be only one show belonging to the Ringlings taking the road next year is very premature, everything depending upon wartime conditions."¹⁰²

When Barnum & Bailey reached Bridgeport on October 16, it found the Ringling crew in full control. According to John Staley, a long-time employee of the Ringlings, during the first two or three weeks after both circuses had unloaded for the winter, the main office was open around the clock with a continuous stream of executives and department heads interviewing for positions with the new combined show.¹⁰³

The armistice that ended the war on November 11, was reported by the *New York Clipper* with enthusiasm, a signal that the troubles of the previous season were over." The sudden and unexpected close of the war acted as a tonic to the jaded nerves of showmen, who had all had a disappointing season, but now rumors are thick and fast of new shows, enlarged shows and two shows under one management."¹⁰⁴

Among those who were no doubt surprised by the sudden end of the war were the Ringling brothers who had been executing their plan for a combined show that would be easier to staff and transport should the war drag on for another year.

It was only days before the war ended that the Ringlings officially announced that there would be only one circus in 1919. The statement, on November 4, explained that the menageries of the

two shows would be consolidated and the combined circus would carry 42 elephants. In an editorial comment, *The Billboard* marveled at the choices that were available to run the circus and applauded the decision to engage Fred Worrel as general manager, Charles Hutchinson as treasurer, Jack Snellen as general superintendent and Jim Whalen as boss canvasman. The article predicted that John, Charles and Alf T. Ringling "are determined to pick the cream of the brains of their organizations for the purpose of building the greatest circus machine in history."¹⁰⁵

A century later, we can evaluate from a historical perspective the operational challenges facing the Ringling brothers, along with the financial landscape that existed at the end of the 1918 season. Financial receipts, now in the



This is possibly the last surviving lithograph that was actually posted for Barnum & Bailey before it combined with Ringling Bros. Although the poster promoted performances in Lake Charles, Louisiana, the show had closed two days earlier, and the date was never played.

Chris Berry Collection

Pfening Archives and analyzed by Fred D. Pfening III, show that in 1918 the Ringling Bros. circus generated \$1,385,703 in revenue while Barnum & Bailey generated \$1,925,306. Together the two shows grossed \$3,311,009.

Although only one circus toured in 1919, the decision to merge the two shows was clearly the right financial strategy. Additional records in the Pfening Archives indicate that in 1919, the first year of the Combined Shows, the circus generated gross revenues of \$3,499,959. Not only was that slightly more than the two shows had generated the previous year, but expenses for the enterprise had been reduced by nearly 50-percent as there were no longer two winter quarters, two trains or two big tops, and only half as many employees on payroll.¹⁰⁶

As the *New York Clipper* reported at the end of the year, 1918 was one of the most challenging seasons in circus history, yet it all ended very quickly. By Thanksgiving all of the circuses were in winter quarters, there were virtually no cases of the flu reported and American soldiers were beginning to plan for their voyage home. Although the nation's railroads remained under control of the federal government

until the spring of 1920, the future looked bright.

With few exception, each of the circus owners who completed the 1918 season returned in 1919. As labor shortages faded, circuses became bigger and audiences responded. The Ringling brothers were now firmly in place as the circus kings, but others such as Al G. Barnes, Charles Sparks, Jerry Muggivan, Bert Bowers, George Christy and Andrew Downie were the crown princes, and each of them would excel in the coming years, no doubt because of the challenges they faced and overcame in 1918. To paraphrase a future President, each of them had been tempered by war, disciplined by labor shortages, proud of their role in providing entertainment, and unwilling to allow train wrecks, epidemics or fierce competition undo the profession that they had chosen.

There is no education like adversity.

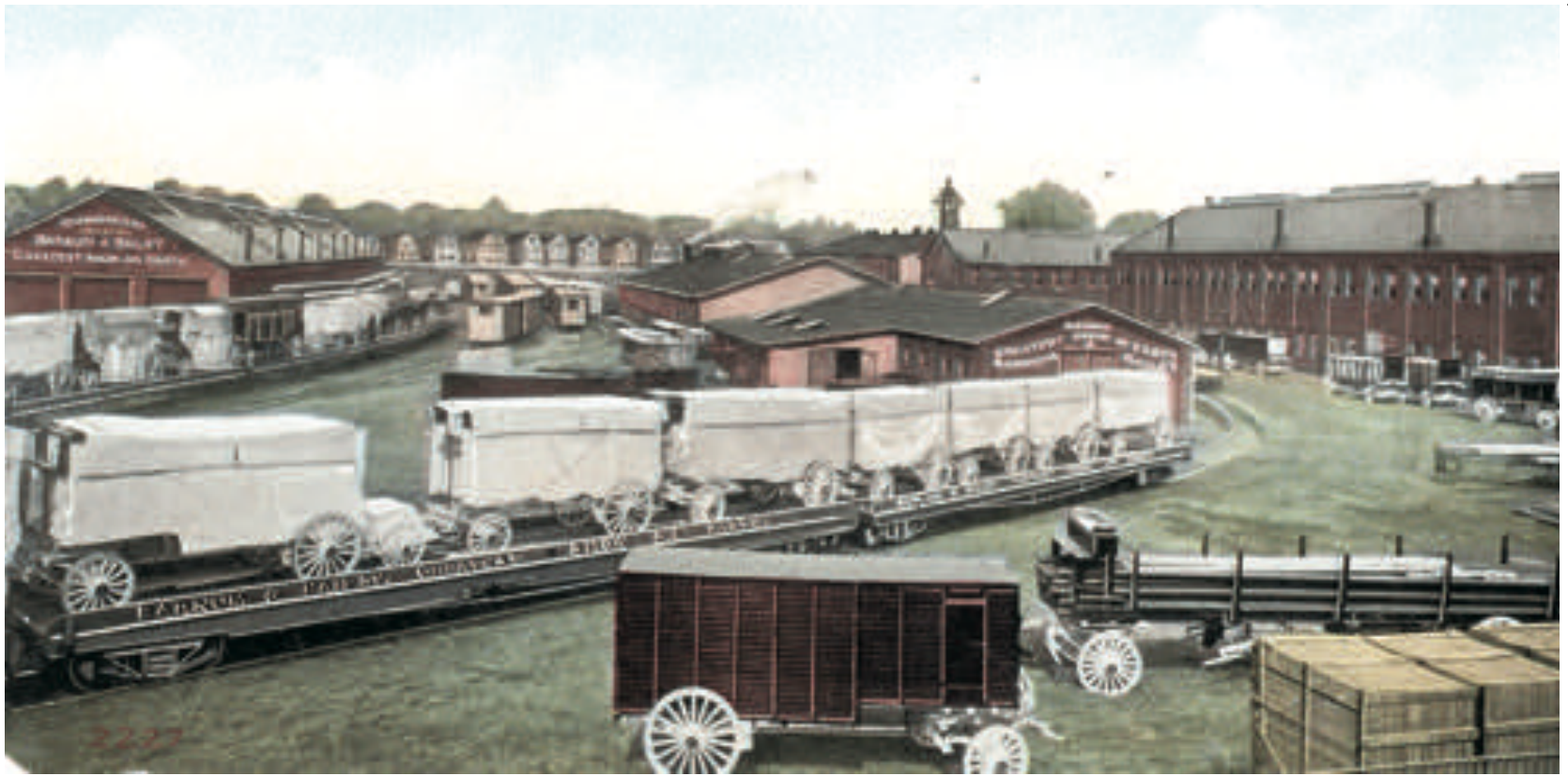
– Benjamin Disraeli

Acknowledgements

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26-year old Lillian Leitzel was a center-ring sensation during the Ringling Bros. performance of 1918. This colorized photo of Leitzel was the inspiration for the 1918 lithograph on the front cover. Look closely, however, and you will note that the image was reversed for the poster design.

Circus World Museum



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THROUGH **JAN 14**

The cultural influence of the circus arts spans its 250 year history. Changes in American culture and evolving ideas of education and entertainment have shaped the visual imagery of circus. This exhibition features brilliantly colored lithographs that advertised the shows as well as extraordinary toys inspired by the iconic animals and performers.

Left: Emil Rothengatter (1848–1939), La Montie Family (detail), circa 1878. Chromolithograph, ht2004632

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Sverre O. Braathen (1895-1974) was a one-of-a-kind circus fan, historian and photographer from Madison, Wisconsin. His images, many captured in the saturated colors of Kodachrome slides, date from the early 1930s to the late 1960s. Set within the context of the entire Braathen collection, these images provide insight to what happened just outside the canvas flaps of the circus tent. The content ranges from the careful unloading of the trains, to rare outdoor performances, to performers (and sometimes their fans or guests) relaxing in the back yard of circuses both large and small.

While we have been hosting these images online for years, we are constantly seeing new things and proclaiming "new" favorites. The images that appear here are some of these. To see more, visit: <https://library.illinoisstate.edu/collections/passion-circus/> or Google "Passion for circus".



Mary Jane Miller leaned against tent guy ropes as other showgirls and clowns relaxed on wooden show trunks waiting for their next appearance in the circus performance in Milwaukee, August 13, 1946. Miller performed with Ringling-Barnum for 13 seasons. Photographs of her on a single trapeze appeared in Life magazine in 1946 and 1953.

Sverre O. Braathen's Enduring Passion for Circus

by Maureen Brunsdale

All photographic images that appear in this article have been provided by Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections in Normal, Illinois.

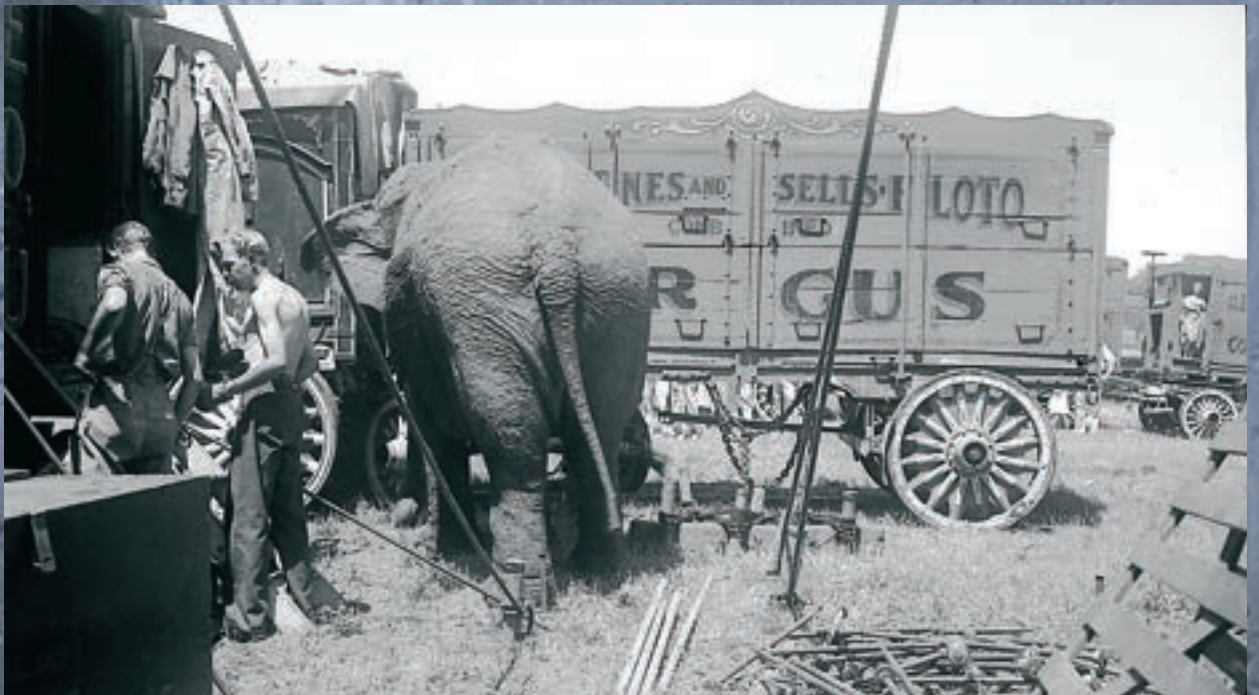


The Ringling Bros. Bell Wagon reposed on the lot in Madison, Wisconsin on August 17, 1941. The venerable old wagon was being prepared for its appearance in the "Old King Cole" spec. The vehicle was in its 50th year of ownership by the show. Ten years later, the Bell Wagon would make a featured appearance in Cecil B. DeMille's epic film about Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. First seen in 1892 with gold carvings set against a Ringling red background, the wagon has had many different decorative paint schemes over the years.



Emmett Kelly set the mood for this image that captured a moment in time during a matinee performance of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. Within this tranquil-appearing group are troupers both young and old, as well as in and out of costume. Braathen took this marvelous photo in his hometown of Madison, Wisconsin in August 1946.

Although perhaps best known for his early color photography of the American circus, Sverre Braathen also took thousands of black & white images – all of which are preserved at Illinois State University Milner Library. This early black & white dates from July 17, 1938 when Braathen caught up with Al G. Barnes – Sells-Floto in La Crosse, Wisconsin.





Sverre Braathen labeled this photograph as "Dressage Rider on Horse." The lovely French equestrienne was Claude Valois. The photo was taken on the backlot in Plainville, Connecticut on June 15, 1949. Valois appeared with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey as early as 1945, and she continued with the show through the 1950 season.



Sverre Braathen's wife, Faye (at right) is seen relaxing under the shade of the big top sidewall with Chicago artist and political cartoonist, Walter Krawiec, and his wife, Harriet on July 22, 1951. Spanish performer Carmen Slayton looks on as Krawiec draws on his sketchpad. During the early 1950s, Slayton was selected for several prominent roles in show productions such as the portrayal of Dorothy in the 1953 "Wizard of Oz" spec.



No activity or subject was too insignificant to attract Braathen's interest. Here he captured twelve members of the cookhouse crew as they peeled potatoes for the evening meal. This 35 mm color slide was taken on July 8, 1954 in DuBois, Pennsylvania.



With one click of his camera, Braathen documented the immense challenges and complexities of circus life. The tied-up canvas sidewall and a baggage wagon reflected in the pool of rainwater, frame this dreary-day composition. The buckets relate more about the story of daily circus existence. The photo was taken on July 17, 1950, and the use of the steel stakes indicates that the ground was undoubtedly dried out and hard when the show arrived in Chicago. The obvious focal point is Gena Mroczkowski, who along with her husband Czeslaw, presented liberty horses and dressage acts on the show for many years. Braathen was good friends with both, but described Gina as "very temperamental."

Elephants draped in pink tutus were ready for their featured role in the Elephant Ballet on a very muddy lot in Oshkosh, Wisconsin on September 7, 1942. The heavily promoted elephant production lost some of its luster during the long tour that followed the Madison Square Garden opening, but it still generated interest in each new stand of the season. The straw spread in the foreground provided fairly stable and cleaner footing for performers and other show staff to traverse the mired showgrounds. The five-pole menagerie tent is seen in the background.



The bright red Circus Diner truck stands in stark contrast to the drab buildings of Cleveland in July 1952. Although the midway concessions stands were already operating that morning, Braathen noted that most of the people in this photo were watching the set up of the big top just off to the right. This was the same lot where the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey menagerie tent caught on fire and was destroyed in 1942. The tall building in the distance was the Van Sweringen Tower built by railroad magnates, its construction completed in 1930.



A flurry of activity blurs this scene as participants, floats and animals were being assembled for the presentation of "Twas the Night Before Christmas," the spec for 1948. Braathen recorded this view on the Milwaukee Lakefront lot on July 24.



The husband and wife team of Rose and William Hanlon performed on Ringling-Barnum for many seasons. The clowning couple posed for Sverre Braathen on a sunny day in 1951 in Columbus, Ohio. Rose was one of the few female clowns who appeared with the Big One over the years in what was otherwise an all-male "clown alley." After Irvin Feld established Clown College, many lady clowns joined on and performed with circuses across the country.





An array of novelty items were available to be purchased by a mom or dad for the youngsters in the family – yet another detail of the vast traveling enterprise that caught Sverre Braathen's eye. The stand that offered these souvenir circus toys was found on the midway of The Greatest Show on Earth in Sheboygan, Wisconsin on July 26, 1948.

Two women wearing large ballroom-style costumes posed for Sverre Braathen in August 1946. The Ringling-Barnum performance that year was produced and staged by Robert Ringling. The spec was "Toyland" with costumes designed by Irene Aronson. In this view, performers are seen exiting the big top as well as preparing to enter for their choreographed appearances in the production.



About the Author



Maureen Brundsdale is the Special Collections & Rare Books Librarian at Illinois State University's Milner Library in Normal, Illinois. She has been a librarian for 25 years, but has been working in Special Collections for the last ten years. An undergraduate degree from St. Olaf College, and two master degrees (one from the University of Iowa, the other from the University of South Dakota) shaped her understanding of history, library science and management. Currently, Maureen is working with Mort Gamble on a book about the spotlight-shunning circus performer-turned-executive, Arthur M. Concello. While she never met Sverre O. Braathen (he died in July 1974), she feels she knows him. They are both from the same small North Dakota town - Mayville.

RINGLING BROS. AND BA

Through the eyes of Henry Ringling North

by Mark Schmitt

All photographic images that appear in this article have been provided by Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections in Normal, Illinois.

The Henry Ringling North Collection held at Illinois State University's Milner Library is a rich trove of business and personal papers and correspondence, Ringling family history, and photographs. The photographic content of the collection runs the gamut of Henry's life and iconic family – including the images that make up this photospread – many of which are likely being seen here for the first time since they were taken.

Henry Ringling North (1909-1993) and his brother John were, of course, the sons of the only Ringling daughter, Ida. John Ringling North presided over

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus with his brother Henry in the role of vice president for several pivotal and storied decades. The featured photographs show Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus through Henry Ringling North's eyes, and find him employing a wide palette of photographic styles from the candid and documentary to carefully composed shots of the most disarming beauty.

The Henry Ringling North Collection came to Milner Library as a donation from his son, John Ringling North II, in 2017.

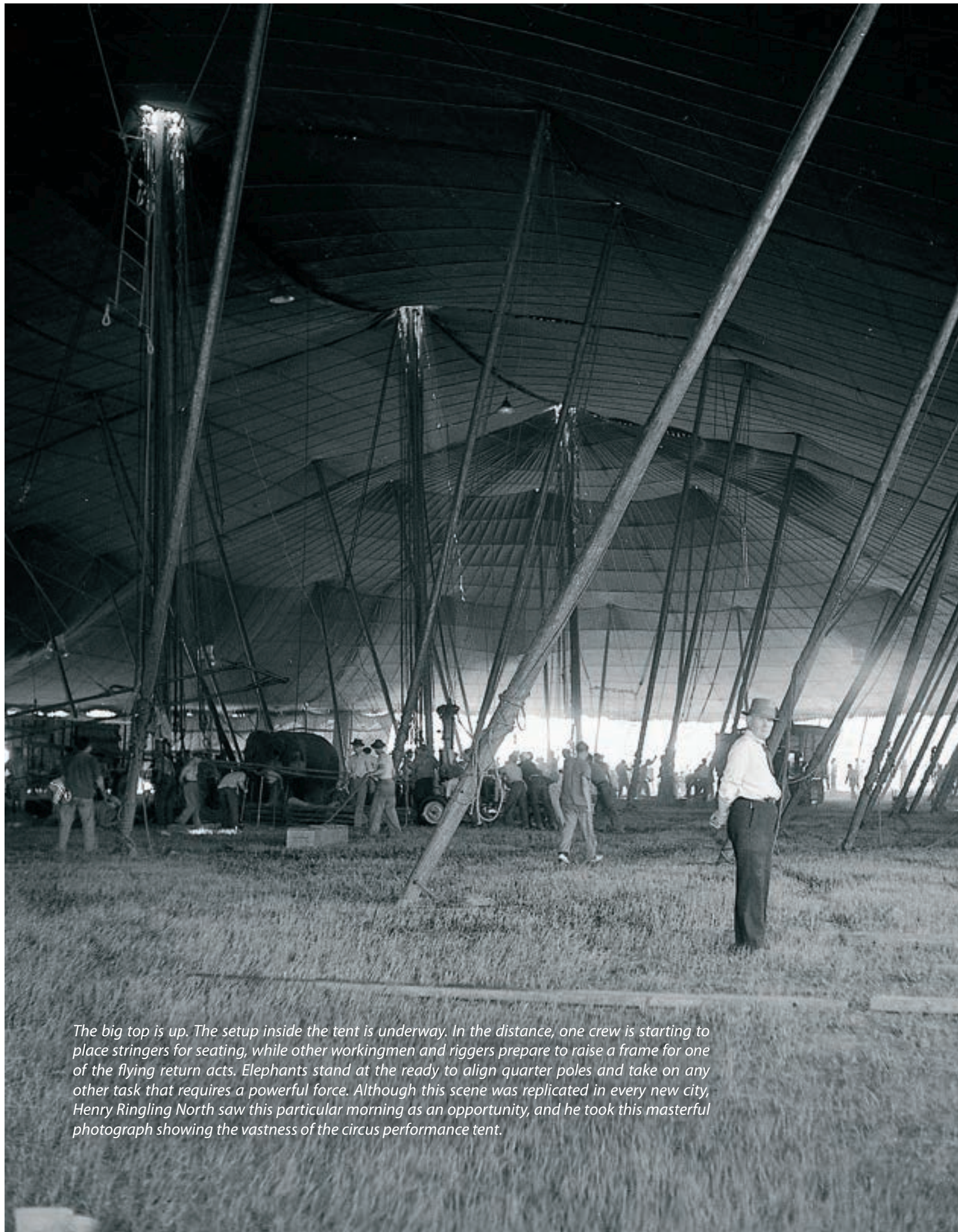
Enjoy.

ARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS

th



Sarasota winter quarters c. 1940



The big top is up. The setup inside the tent is underway. In the distance, one crew is starting to place stringers for seating, while other workingmen and riggers prepare to raise a frame for one of the flying return acts. Elephants stand at the ready to align quarter poles and take on any other task that requires a powerful force. Although this scene was replicated in every new city, Henry Ringling North saw this particular morning as an opportunity, and he took this masterful photograph showing the vastness of the circus performance tent.



In this incredible photograph, Henry Ringling North candidly captured Gloria Hunt as she waited for her next production appearance to begin. Gloria and her twin sister Bonnie joined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey for the 1936 season and performed as "production girls" for many years. This picture was taken during the summer tour in 1940. One of the productions that the Hunt twins appeared in that season was the aerial ballet directed by Ed Rooney. Ed and Jennie Rooney presented their double trapeze act that season as part of a separate three-ring aerial display.



Two of the show's electrical generator wagons caught Henry Ringling North's attention during the 1942 tour. They were positioned next to the Electrical Dept. awning. Flood lights on top of Generator Wagon #180 provided illumination for part of the lot during the night show as well as during the teardown.




Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was playing a one-day stand in Pittsfield, Massachusetts on July 19, 1942 when a severe storm hit the area. The night performance had to be cancelled. One can only speculate on how North was able to time his camera to record a bolt of lightning that appears to be striking the big top. Note the air-conditioning ducts laying limp on the tent canvas.



Henry Ringling North took this candid photograph of Arthur "Art" Concello (1911-2001) during the summer of 1940. Concello, who had achieved stardom as a circus flyer, would be hired two years later by Henry's brother to serve as General Manager of The Greatest Show on Earth. When John Ringling North was forced to give up the helm of the circus after the 1942 season, Concello followed suit and resigned in 1943. He did, of course, later return to the management of the circus, as did Johnny North.



During John Ringling North's first season in charge of the gigantic circus (1938), he brought the American public Gargantua the Great and began initiating many modernizations on the show. When in 1956 North closed the show in Pittsburgh and claimed that the tented circus was "a thing of the past," he was loathed by many circus fans. Nevertheless, John and his brother continued to produce the show for another dozen years, and they played a significant role in successfully transitioning to indoor tours. Henry took this photo of his brother working at his desk at the Sarasota winter quarters in November 1939.



Above, The Flying Concellos executed a perfect "passing leap" during a performance in New York's Madison Square Garden in April of 1940, and Henry Ringling North clicked his camera's shutter at just the right instant. The action is artistically framed by the row of lights above and the illuminated net below. Jules Leotard is credited with creating the first flying act in Paris in 1859, although the rigging and mechanics of such acts had evolved considerably by 1940.

Right, this dramatic portrait photograph of Antoinette Concello (1904-1984) records the aerialist curling her hair just prior to a posed photo session with Henry Ringling North. North took the picture in 1940. Then, as in years to follow, Antoinette, demonstrated to other female performers how to best apply their make-up, "fix" their hair, and properly style to audiences. Antoinette Concello was arguably one of the greatest flyers of the 20th century, male or female, and at the peak of her performing career she regularly attempted, and more often than not, caught the triple somersault.

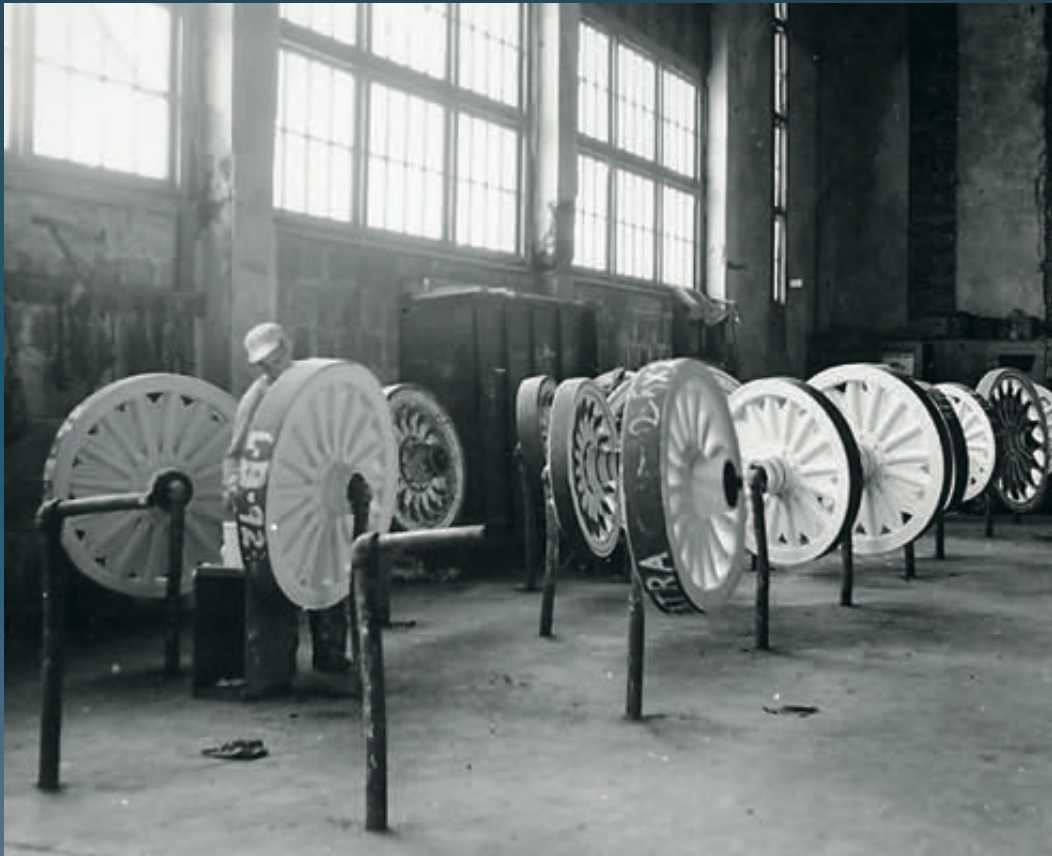




Henry North took many photographs at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey winter quarters when the show was in residence there – among them this picture of the Jomar. The private railroad car had served for many years as John Ringling's home when he traveled with the show, and in later years John Ringling North used it as his quarters while on the road. The Pullman Company built the Jomar in 1917. North had the car renovated in 1940, and this image dates from that time when the car's interior was being luxuriously outfitted.

Two small step ladders held the plank on which this artist striped Ringling-Barnum Ticket Wagon #123 in the winter quarters paint shop. The wagon served the show for many years as both a ticket wagon and as an office. It was also the wagon loaded on the circus train that was robbed in a well-known scene in the movie *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Today, the wagon is preserved at Circus World Museum in Baraboo.





A worker paints the sunburst on one of the many wheels placed on the L-shaped pipe brackets that were embedded in the concrete floor of the paint shop. The purpose for these pipes was to make it possible to easily rotate the wheels, thus making the task of painting them more efficient. North's photograph may have recorded the last time this type of work was done, as the old parade wagon wheels were soon replaced with pneumatic tires.

The great Asian elephant Modoc danced solo on the hippodrome track under the watchful eye of her handler. Henry Ringling North produced this dramatic photograph of the famed elephant working in the spotlight immediately in front of the first row of reserved seats. Although not absolutely confirmed, the date is probably from 1940 as are the majority of these North images.





North's notation for this act recorded its name as "Rola Rola." They were Brazilian acrobats who presented a rola bola routine on a high table-like platform. In this shot, one of the acrobats is launching himself into a back somersault down to the ring cloth. This is yet another image from the summer of 1940. Note how North routinely took his photos from a distance.



The legendary press agent and artist, Roland Butler, is seen drawing in his railroad car office at the circus winter quarters. Butler's artwork was reproduced on a number of different posters that were heavily used to advertise the coming of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. He also created graphics that appeared on everything from program covers to Christmas cards, and his designs were used by many different shows well into the 1960s.



At left, the 1940 Ringling-Barnum Magazine and Daily Review (souvenir program) identified these center ring trampoline performers as "Adrianna & Charly." Undoubtedly, it took tremendous strength to perform hand-balancing maneuvers on the unstable surface of the trampoline. This photograph and many of the other photos in this article, suggests that North used a special camera with a lens that made possible such remarkable under-the-big-top and indoor images.

About the Author

Mark Schmitt has worked at Illinois State University's Milner Library for more than 20 years – nearly nine of which have been spent in Special Collections as a Senior Specialist. He has a Bachelor's Degree in English from Illinois State. He co-authored the book *The Bloomington-Normal Circus Legacy: The Golden Age of Aerialists* with Maureen Brunsdale in 2013. Mark was born and raised in Bloomington, Illinois.



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ALFRED COURT

ACROBAT

CIRCUS OWNER

ANIMAL TRAINER

by Dominique Jando



Alfred Court with his magnificent snow leopard, Douchka in the late 1930s.

Circus World Museum

Alfred Court (1883-1977) is perhaps the most remarkable French circus personality of the first half of the 20th century. Beginning his career as an outstanding acrobat, he became a successful, yet adventurous, circus entrepreneur, first in Mexico and later in Europe, before ending as one of the greatest wild animal trainers of all times – and as such, a major circus star in Europe and America.



Seen here at the winter quarters in Sarasota, Alfred Court was a one-of-a-kind wild animal trainer during the first half of the 20th century.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



Norman Bel Geddes designed this poster in 1940 to promote Alfred Court's wild animal acts. Court performed on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey for five seasons.

Circus World Museum

He was born into a wealthy family in Marseille, France, on January 1, 1883. His father, Joseph Court-Payen, worked for the family's soap business.¹ His mother was the daughter of the Marquis de Clapier, a rich aristocrat well introduced in political circles. Alfred was the youngest of a family of ten children.

Considering his pedigree, chances that Alfred Court would become a circus acrobat were slim at best. A strong-willed kid, young Alfred was by no means rebellious, and by his own account, he had a happy childhood. But he was the last-born of a large brood and was not necessarily expected to join in the family business. This gave him some freedom of mind. Furthermore, his parents never discouraged his early passion for circus and acrobatics – a passion he shared with his older brother, Jules (1880-1955).

Circa 1890, Alfred and Jules Court were sent to a Jesuit school in the Prado, a seaside borough of Marseille. Alfred and Jules also started training in gymnastics, which was all the rage among young men at the time. Society amateur circuses were flourishing then, like the famous Cirque Molière in Paris, and these were also the times when another sports enthusiast, the Baron Pierre de Coubertin, revived the Olympic Games in 1896.

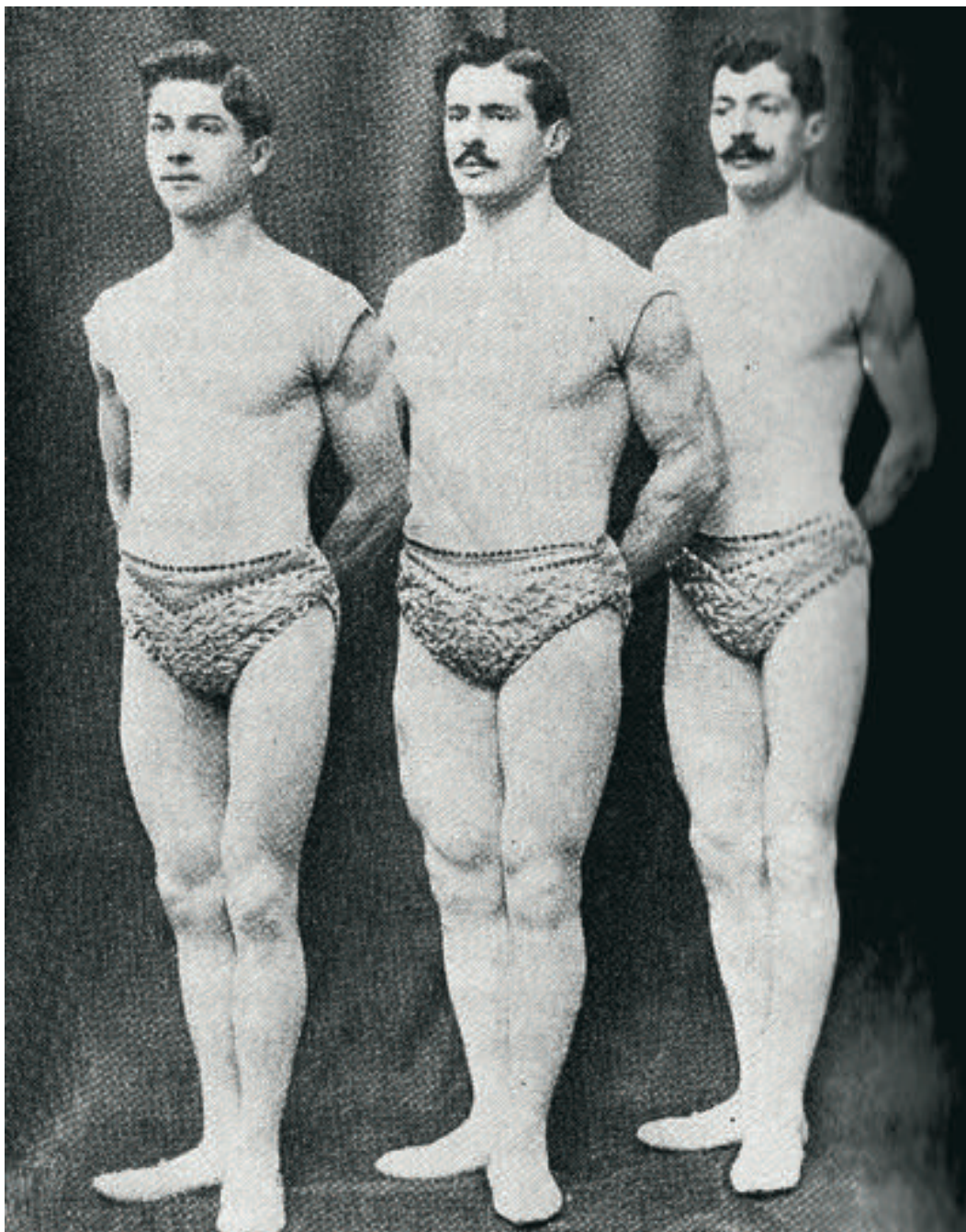
Over the years, Court developed an amazing strength,

concealed by his slender build, and an outstanding talent on horizontal bars. An arduous gymnastics specialty, horizontal bars are also one of the most difficult acrobatic acts in the circus repertoire, and is rarely seen today. Yet it was relatively popular and quite alluring in the 1890s, and this was the specialty young Alfred chose to embrace for his upcoming circus debut.

Alfred Egelton

At age 16, Alfred Court partnered with an acrobat named Alfred Lexton, and embarked on a circus career that was to last a half-century. He left home with the blessing of his parents, promising his mother to write every day, which he dutifully did until her death when he was in his forties. Under the name of Egelton (originally spelled "Egelthon"), which had a fashionable English sound, he made his professional debut on January 4, 1899 at the Palais de la Jetée, a vaudeville house on a peer on the Promenade des Anglais, in Nice.²

The act of Lexton & Egelton was performed on three parallel horizontal bars, as was generally the custom. Alfred "Egelton" Court was a perfectionist and trained indefatigably, a quality that, to Court's dismay, his partner did not share; in spite of his young age, Court was already a remark-



Left to right are Féné Gavazza, Alfred Court, and Jules Court, c. 1905. Billed as the Egeltons, they presented a horizontal bar act on shows throughout Europe. Dominique Jando Archive

able “barriste” (the French word for horizontal bar acrobats), able to perform practically all of the most difficult tricks in the repertoire.

After their stint at the Palais de la Jetée, Lexton & Egelton were offered an engagement with the Cristiani circus of the famous Italian equestrian family, which had just returned from Spain, and was traveling through France on its way back to Italy. Thus, Alfred Court made his circus debut in Bayonne in the southwest of France with Circo Cristiani in 1899.

The act of Lexton & Egelton was enjoying a successful run, until Alfred Court had a bad fall, serious enough

to incapacitate him for several weeks. Alfred Lexton could not stay without work for that long, and he took advantage of an offer to work in Germany. Court and Lexton parted ways amicably, and the Lexton & Egelton act ceased to exist. Without a partner, Alfred Court worked for a few months with a small traveling theater company, and then returned to Marseille.

Back home, Alfred Court teamed up with his brother Jules and a remarkable lightweight acrobat, “Féné” Gavazza. The new “Egeltons” went on to perform successfully all over Europe and finally with the popular circus Pinder, with which they toured the French provinces from 1905 to 1908. At circus Pinder, Alfred met his future wife, the talented equestrienne Renée Vasserot.

Circus Producer

At the same time, between engagements, the brothers Court tried their hand at producing and presenting their own “Cirque Egelton” shows in temporary wooden circus structures (known as “constructions”) erected in French provincial towns during seasonal fairs. They also developed a “Looping the Loop” thrill act on a bicycle (a popular type of attraction at that time), which they quickly abandoned. Like

all attractions of that genre, their bicycle thrill act was impeded by cumbersome equipment that was difficult to transport and to install.

Jules Court left the Egeltons’ bar act at the end of the 1908 season and went on to create a talent agency. The brothers, however, had decided they would have their own traveling circus as soon as they had gathered sufficient capital. The following year, their home city of Marseille gave them the authorization to build a wooden circus construction on the Place Saint-Michel.

The new Cirque Egelton was a comfortable and elaborate structure that could accommodate 3,800 spectators. Until

1913, it offered remarkable circus programs that met with great success. But these programs, which changed regularly, were more expensive than Alfred and Jules Court could truly afford, and the brothers had to declare bankruptcy in 1912. They reorganized as “Cirque Standard” for the 1913 season, their last in that Marseille building.

In the winter of 1912, the Court brothers had also toured in association with the famous Italian daredevil and circus entrepreneur, Ugo Ancilotti (1869-1925), with a traveling circus under a big top, the “Cirque Impérial Russe.” It was a short-lived venture, not too surprisingly since the Russian flavor of the program had been created by giving pseudo-Russian names to the performers. Renée Vasserot, for example, was billed as “Madame Vasseroff.”

Alfred Court had developed a taste for circus under canvas at Cirque Pinder, and owning his own traveling big top was what he truly wanted. He began to make plans for the creation of a “Zoo Zirkus” (with this German spelling), but everything came to naught when the Great War started in August 1914 after the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire. By then, however, Alfred Court had already left Europe, and was performing in the United States with the Ringling Bros. Circus.

The Orpingtons and Circo Europeo

After his brother had called it quits, Alfred Court had created a new hand-to-hand acrobatic act, The Orpingtons, with his wife, Renée, and a student of his, Louis Vernet. It was again a remarkable act, showcasing Court’s tremendous strength. It had eventually caught the attention of Charles

Ringling and, in April 1914, The Orpingtons debuted with the Ringling Bros. Circus in Chicago.

The Orpingtons had a two-year contract with Ringling. For the 1915 season, they added a perch-pole act to their repertoire, which they performed in the center ring. During the winter months, they played dates in Cuba, where they eventually got a long-term engagement with Antonio Vicente Pubillones, in his popular Circo Pubillones. They performed there in 1918 with their hand-to-hand and perch-pole acts and shared the bill with Alfredo Codona, who had just left the Siegrist-Silbon troupe and was performing his own flying trapeze act for the first time.

During this engagement, Alfred Court had an insider look at the sometimes-improbable way circuses operated in Central America – and he did not fail to notice their attractive financial prospective. At the end of 1918, he joined forces with the Mexican Mijares family to create “Circo Europeo,” a show with a 2,000-seat big top they toured by train and boat in remote Mexican areas that rarely saw circuses, with short incursions into Honduras and Guatemala.

It was during this Mexican tour that Alfred Court became a wild animal trainer. Unable to find a replacement for a drunken lion trainer he had fired, he decided to present the act himself. He had nurtured a keen interest in big cats for a while, and this experience would transform that interest into a passion that lasted a lifetime. It also practically cost him the circuses he later created in France.

Circo Europeo had secured the services of a legendary and flamboyant Mexican circus impresario, Don Juan Treviño, who was in reality a French expatriate from Bordeaux. Treviño, a street-smart entrepreneur who had created his



This watercolor by Marthe and Juliette Vesque depicts Alfred Court’s Zoo-Circus during the engagement in Versailles, France in 1924.

MuCEM, Collection des Arts du Spectacle, Marseille, France

own Circo Treviño in 1897, had fallen out of luck, and served Court as a mixture of advance man and fixer, using his vast experience in touring circuses around Mexico.

When World War I came to an official end with the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919, Alfred and Renée Court decided to return to France, and Court sold the equipment of Circo Europeo at a low price to his friend Don Treviño. Court's partner, Louis Vernet, remained with Treviño in Mexico, where he created a perch-pole act with a new partner named Evans.

Back to Paris, and flush with American dollars, Court revived his association with the aging Ugo Ancilotti. They ran for a short while a tenting circus that opened in Versailles in 1920 and began touring the French provinces. This new association was short lived. Ancilotti was ill (he would die a few years later, in 1925), and he quickly sold his interests in the company (notably its equipment) to Alfred Court.



Alfred Court and young friend, c. 1930.

Dominique Jando Archive

The Zoo Circus

Meanwhile, Court had resumed his acrobatic training with his wife and a new partner, Lucien Goddard. Most importantly, he had revived his work on the Zoo Zirkus project, which had been interrupted by the war. The circus title was changed to Zoo Circus, which certainly sounded better at that point to French ears, and with Ancilotti's equipment as a foundation, it was now ready to go. Jules Court came aboard to take care of the administrative side of the project.

The Zoo Circus came to life in Limoges, France, in the spring of 1921. It was, in many aspects, an original concept in France: a circus with a vast menagerie inspired at first by the German circus of Carl Hagenbeck – thus the original title, Zoo Zirkus – but also, undoubtedly, by the circuses Court had seen in the United States. It traveled daily with the help of a fleet of motorized vehicles at a time when other French circuses moved either by train or, like Pinder, with

horse-drawn carriages.

The menagerie was contained in a single large tent adjacent to the big top, as was the custom in the United States, and it included ethnic exhibitions, a trademark of Zirkus Hagenbeck, and sideshow attractions like those Court had seen at the Ringling Bros. Circus. The menagerie, in its first season, was still a little light on content and, oddly, there was no cage act in the performance until December, when the German trainer Otto Sailer-Jackson was hired with a group of tigers from Circus Krone.

Sailer-Jackson was a celebrated wild animal trainer from the Hagenbeck school. He stayed with the Zoo Circus for the Holiday season, long enough to give Alfred Court the opportunity to observe his work attentively, which he would

emulate, down to the “cowboy” costume. The Hagenbeck method consisted of using the cats’ natural abilities to create acts that emphasized the animals’ innate talents – instead of simply showing the confrontational image of “man vs. beast” favored by the so-called lion tamers of the 19th century.

The Court menagerie expanded in 1922 with the purchase of a large group of polar bears from Hagenbeck, which Alfred Court presented himself (as Egelton) the following season, in a program that also included the seven lions of Martha-la-Corse and the group of lions and tigers presented by her husband, Marcel Chaffreix. Martha-la-Corse and Marcel were well known in the traveling menagerie business, and the addition of their acts and their animal collection to the Zoo Circus lineup helped at last to fully justify its name.

Alfred Court eventually developed his own wild-animal collection. At the end of 1924, he began advertising cage acts for rent to other circuses, including a group of ten tigers, another of 18 lions, his own group of twelve polar bears, a group of ten panthers, and a mixed group of wolves and hyenas. The latter was one of the groups presented within the menagerie tent itself during the tour.



Court began presenting polar bears in 1922 when he purchased a large group from Carl Hagenbeck. He later incorporated some of the giant arctic bears in mixed acts that also included lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars and Himalayan black bears.

Circus World Museum

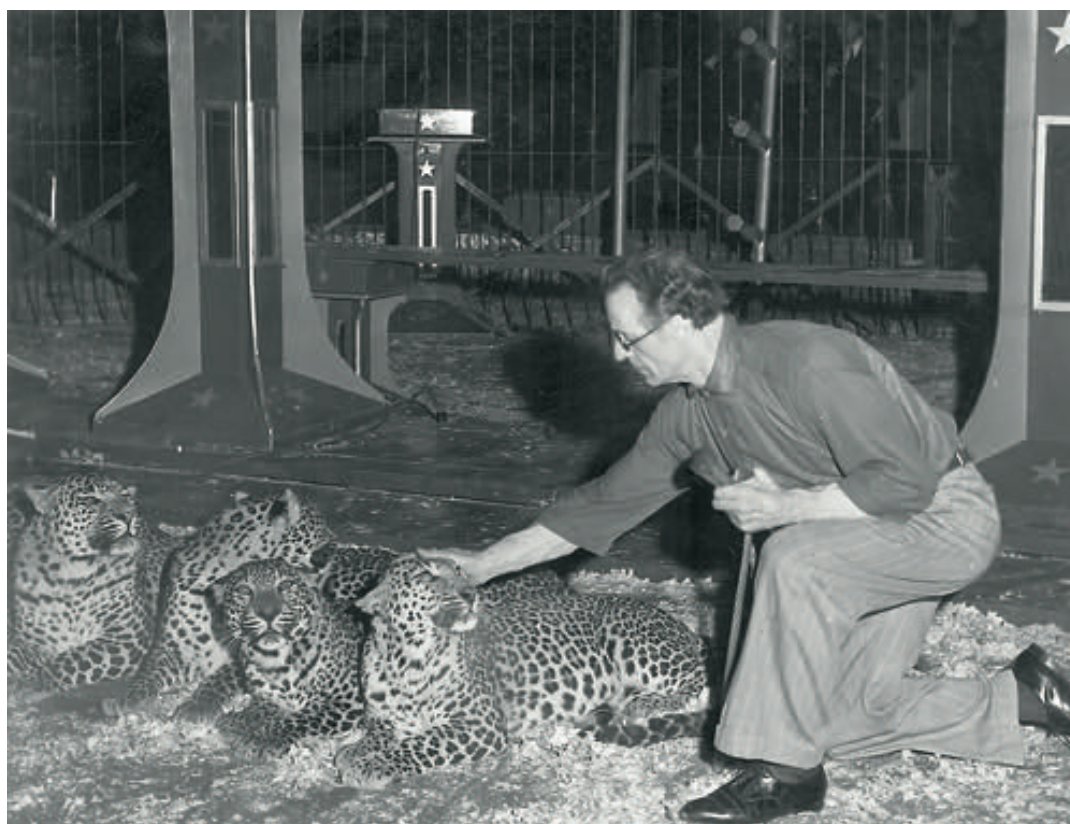
The immediate aftermath of World War I was a booming period for European circuses, and the Zoo Circus steadily grew in importance, becoming one of France's premier tenting circuses. By 1925, the menagerie boasted a collection of 25 lions, eight tigers, nine hyenas, seven wolves, three cougars, twelve polar bears, 16 panthers and leopards, five jaguars, two cheetahs, and an extensive assemblage of exotic animals including antelopes, llamas and camels, down to monkeys, porcupines and mongooses.

Court had now in his employ two trainers to assist him, who would in time build brilliant careers on their own: Vojtech Trubka, who presented the polar bears, and Johnny de Kok, who was in charge of a group of ten lions. In time, several others would come and work with Court. Court himself presented his tigers and was now using his real name. Unlike his German and American counterparts, however, his Zoo Circus never had a significant herd of elephants. The largest Court ever lined up was a group of eight elephants presented by his brother-in-law, Eugène Vasserot, in 1928.

The Many Circuses of Alfred Court

The 1927 season marked the Zoo Circus's apogee, immediately followed by the beginning of its decline. His initial success had led Alfred Court to expand beyond his means, something that strained his relations with his brother Jules. Consequently, the brothers decided to create two separate units of the Zoo Circus, one touring in France, under Jules's management, the other in Spain, under Alfred's management. This move resulted in a very profitable season, with the Courts' vast zoological collection supported by the income of two circuses instead of one.

The following year, in association with a French circus entrepreneur, Pierre Périé, they sent a "Barnum's Circus" on the road. It was a three-ring affair that professed to be the American original, but with a program that was not, by any stretch of the imagination, up to par. The enterprise did not last long. Meanwhile, the Zoo Circus continued its tour, with Alfred Court presenting the first of his remarkable mixed-animals cage acts. The act comprised ten lions, two tigers, a cougar, seven brown and white bears, and a couple of great Danes.



Court with some of his many leopards, c. 1942.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

At the end of 1928, the Courts set up their three-ring big top, renamed “Arène Olympique” in their hometown of Marseille. This time, they filled the rings with a truly strong show, which ended with three simultaneous cage acts: a group of twelve lions presented by Vargas, the mixed group which now included 23 animals presented by Max Stolle in the center ring, and Alfred Court himself with his group of eight tigers.

With close to 50 high-quality acts, the Arène Olympique show was impressive indeed, and at the beginning of its run, the audience came en masse. But the weather changed suddenly, and a surprisingly cold winter hit the habitually balmy Mediterranean city of Marseille. The tent was not heated, and the audience quickly dwindled. The show folded after one month. It was a financial disaster.

A severe cold front enveloped Europe that winter. When Alfred and Jules Court tried to resume the 1929 season under the Zoo Circus big top, it collapsed under a snowstorm. To try to raise money quickly, they revived their three-ring big top and the “Barnum’s Circus” deception, hoping that, with the proper advertising, the paying public would take the bait. They toured it until November, but with a program that did not match what the advertising promised.

Meanwhile, the Zoo Circus hit the road again under the management of Alfred’s nephew, Charles Court, with a show that was also not what the public had been accustomed to. In spite of some good acts, there was no cage act, and the animal contingent was reduced to a chimpanzee act and two

equestrian displays. To raise money, Alfred Court had placed his wild animal acts with other circuses.

At the end of the season, the Courts were in a bad financial shape. The postwar boom had ended, and the competition had become fierce. In 1930, the Zoo Circus went back on tour. The Courts also rented the name “Wilhelm Hagenbeck” from the Hagenbecks, and sent a second unit on the road with a show that, this time, was true to the Hagenbecks’ name and reputation. Exotic animal tableaux were interspersed throughout the performance, and the second half was dedicated to three large cage acts – Willy Hagenbeck’s 16 polar bears presented by Carl Herbig, Court’s tigers presented by

Kovack, and a mixed group of ten lions, four bears, two leopards, two cougars, two hyenas, two wolves and two German mastiffs presented by Max Stolle.

The Cirque Wilhelm Hagenbeck played Paris in July with good success. At the end of the season, the Courts had managed to be in the black again. The Zoo Circus and the Cirque Wilhelm Hagenbeck went back on the road in 1931, but, this time, the business was disappointing. The Courts sent only one show on tour the following year, a tenting affair they called “Robinson and His Savage Tribes.” It was a mixture of a Wild West exhibition and a classical circus with acts that were all sprinkled with an exotic flavor.

Unfortunately, Robinson’s special blend of fake exotic components failed to attract the public attention, and the Courts returned to the Zoo Circus title, thinking that it had a better chance to attract audiences to the big top. But it was too late. At the end of 1932, the situation was beyond repair. Alfred and Jules Court folded their tents and filed for bankruptcy.

Alfred Court, Cat Trainer

The brothers parted ways. Jules Court became Cirque Pinder’s administrative manager, while Alfred began training cat acts that he could rent to various circuses. He had two trainers in his employ, Vojtech Trubka, who presented his group of tigers, and Violette d’Argens, with a group of lions. But his directorial ambitions had not left him, and he was ready to launch yet another circus.

In association with Pierre Perié and Jean Roche, he created the “Cirque Olympia,” which was to tour the south of France and then travel in Spain. It was a very modest circus that hit the road in June 1934, although the publicity inflated considerably its importance. Spanish audiences were not fooled, and the show folded in July. In December, Court transformed what was left of his circus into a traveling menagerie, which he toured for one season, in 1935. His days as a circus owner were over.

Alfred Court started again working as a performer. He presented “La Paix dans la Jungle” (Peace in the Jungle) – a group of three lions, two tigers, two leopards, three polar bears, and three black bears – at Paris’s Cirque Medrano in February 1936. It was the beginning of a very successful international career as a wild animal trainer. Meanwhile, his other cage acts were still engaged with various circuses all over Europe.

The following year (1937), Alfred Court trained a new group of 15 small cats that comprised nine leopards (including three black specimen), a rarely seen snow leopard, four cougars and a black jaguar. He was now working in Europe’s most important circuses and variety theaters, including the legendary Wintergarten in Berlin and the Empire Music-Hall Cirque in Paris.

When World War II started in Europe in September 1939, Court was finishing the season at the Tower Circus in Blackpool, England. His three other acts were scattered in Scandinavia: two mixed groups and the tiger act. He managed to gather his troupes and bring the rest of his menagerie and his employees to England. Earlier, Court had received an offer from John Ringling North to come to the United States and work with his animals on *The Greatest Show on Earth*. He had refused at first, but these were different times. When North reiterated his offer, Court took it.

Circus Star in America

In Liverpool, Alfred Court embarked with 80 animals, 20 employees,

and all his equipment on the “West-Chatala,” which took sail for the New World. He and wife embarked soon after on the “Manhattan” in Genoa, Italy, which was close to Nice, where



Alfred Court's mixed wild animal act received top billing at the Blackpool Tower Circus in 1939. The circus also included the Great Wallendas high-wire act and the celebrated clowns Cairoli (Charlie Cairoli and his father, Jean-Marie Cairoli).

Circus Friends of Great Britain Collection



Court presenting one of his three wild animal acts that appeared on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey for the first time in 1940.

Circus World Museum

they now lived. They arrived in Sarasota, Florida, where Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey had its winter quarters, in time for rehearsals before the season opening at Madison Square Garden, in New York, on April 4, 1940.

Court opened the program with three simultaneous cage acts – three mixed groups presented by Harry and May Kovar, Fritz Schulz, and Court himself in the center arena. Other trainers would later come to assist or replace them, including Damoo Dhotre, Joseph Walsh, and Court's nephew, Willy Storey (who would be

In the early 1940s, Alfred Court rehearsed and presented his wild animal acts at the Ringling-Barnum winter quarters in Sarasota, Florida.

Circus World Museum



his last apprentice) among others. Court's contract, signed for two years, was renewed at the end of the 1941 season.

But there had been changes. In August, a fire had destroyed the menagerie tent; more than 60 circus animals died. Court's cages were usually kept behind the big top for the performance, and his animals were not injured. But the incident resulted in an internal crisis among the shareholders of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey corporation (all members of the Ringling family), which led John Ringling North to resign as president of the circus. His cousin, Robert Ringling, an opera singer, took the reins.

As fate would have it, Robert Ringling eventually presided over a far greater tragedy than the menagerie fire. On July 6, 1944, in Hartford, Connecticut, a fire destroyed the big top during the matinee performance. There were 168 victims, including 84 children, and 487 others suffered burns or injuries. It had happened soon after Court's three-ring display, and the steel tunnels that had linked the outside cages to the steel arenas in the rings were still in place. Many deaths occurred when panicked spectators piled up against one of these tunnels, which obstructed a narrow path to the exit.

In his memoirs, Court blamed the safety code that was then in place: the size and distribution of the exits were inadequate for the 12,000-seat tent of the giant circus. He had himself complained about the exiguity of the corridors where the tunnels lead-



Court was an imaginative trainer, here working with leopards on a "teeter-totter" apparatus.

Circus World Museum

ing to the side rings were set up. His helpers had barely enough room to move between the tunnels and the bleachers, and this proximity put them constantly at risk from being mauled by the cats they led back and forth in the narrow space.

But, as they say, "the show must go on," and so it went. For the 1945 season, Alfred Court had noted that Robert Ringling liked to see pretty showgirls in the ring with practically every act. He offered to create an act with twelve leopards and twelve dancers together in the cage. The number was eventually reduced to six courageous girls and was presented in the center ring by Willy Storey and Damoo Dhotre. By then, Court, who was 62, had completely retired from the ring.



Cage wagons that housed some of Alfred Court's wild animals are visible in this 1941 photograph taken in Milwaukee. The steel side panel of the fourth wagon down the line has not yet been opened. A careful observer will also note the open end of a light plant wagon positioned in the distance.

Illinois State University Milner Library Special Collections



In the foreground of this photo, Court is seen filming one of his tigers "on the high-wire."

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

Epilogue

In May, the Germans surrendered, and the War in Europe was over. At the end of the season, Court disposed of some of his animals, and he returned to France at the beginning of 1946. He later sold what was left of his menagerie



This wildly circulated publicity picture shows the renowned French trainer, c. 1938.

Circus World Museum



Court created this act with twelve leopards and six lovely showgirls for Robert Ringling. The act debuted in 1945, even though Court was no longer touring with the big show that year.

Circus World Museum

erie to the Amar brothers, including the group of small cats presented by Damoo Dhotre who returned from the United States in 1949. Then, Renée and Alfred Court retired definitively to their villa in Nice. A prolific raconteur, Court began to write his memoirs, parts of which were published in various magazines, and much later, in 2007, edited as a book. Some of what concerned his career as an animal trainer was also published in book form in France, England, Germany and the United States. But the bulk of his writings remains unpublished.

On December 30, 1974, the Jury of the first International Circus Festival of Monte Carlo, presided over by Prince Rainier III of Monaco, awarded Alfred Court a Gold Clown³ in tribute to his exceptional career. A few days later, Prince Rainier, an amateur cat trainer himself, went to visit Court in his villa in Nice and presented the 91-year-old wild animal trainer with the award. Alfred Court was back in the limelight for one last time, and his legend got an ultimate boost. He passed away three years later, on July 1, 1977. He was laid to rest in the Caucade cemetery in Nice, his final hometown. **Bw**

Readers can consult Dominique Jando's "Circopedia.org" website for hundreds of other circus history topics.

Endnotes

1. Marseille is France's soap industry capital.
2. Alfred Court, *Memoires d'Alfred Court*, Aulnay-sous-Bois, Editions Arts des 2 Mondes, 2007.
3. The International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo continues to this day, and its jury grants Gold, Silver and Bronze Clowns (along with many other awards) analogous to the medals bestowed at the modern Summer and Winter Olympics.



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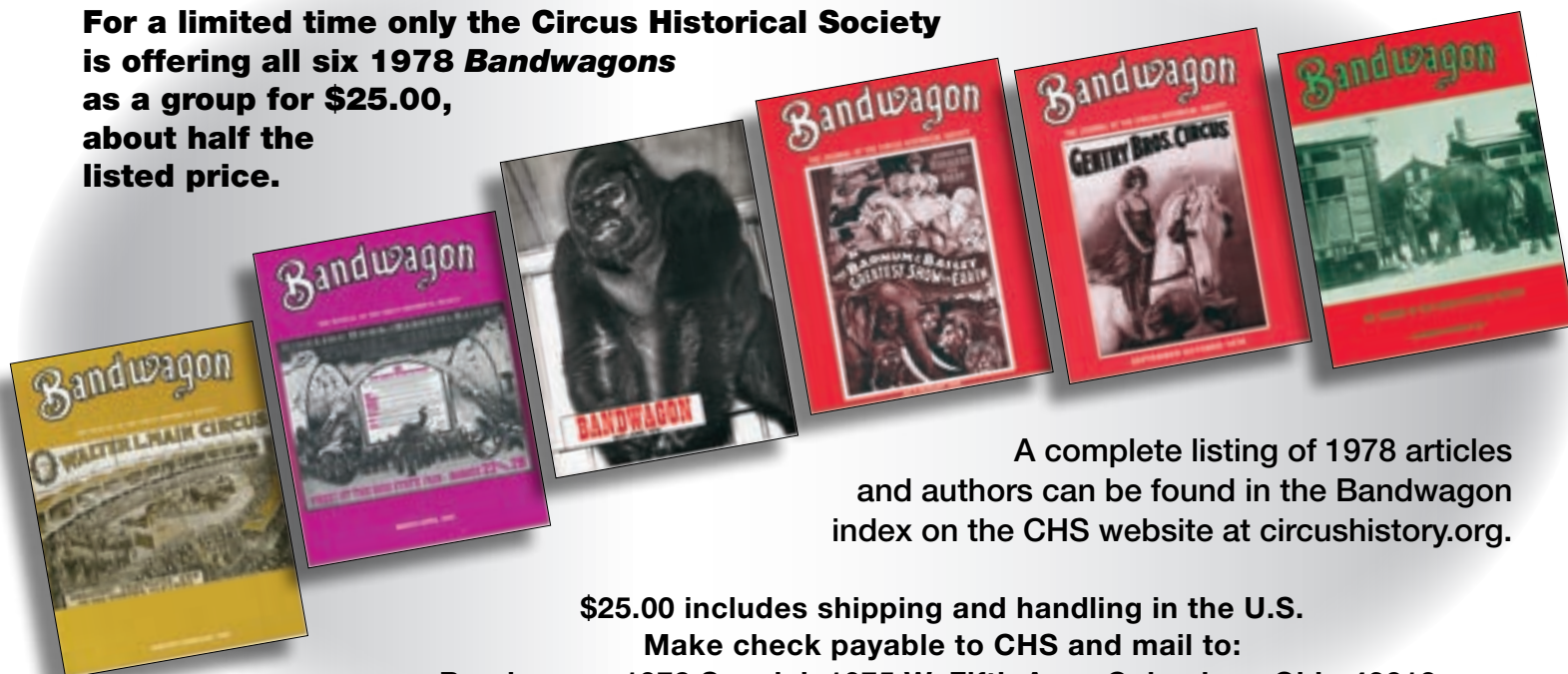
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Make No Small Plans

Irvin Feld Enters the Center Ring

by Chris Berry

When John Ringling North announced the end of the canvas era in 1956, several promoters began working with Art Concello, booking the circus into arenas that were sprouting up across the land. Among them were Irvin and Israel Feld, whose Super Shows Inc. had pioneered arena bookings with rock and roll programs that featured entertainers such as Paul Anka, Chubby Checker and The Beatles.¹ For ten years, the Feld brothers were among a small group of promoters who also booked the indoor dates for the circus. A decade after he began working with the show, Irvin Feld approached John Ringling North in 1967 about purchasing the circus in a partnership with Broadway producers Cy Fier and Ernie Martin. Although that deal fell through, Feld continued his quest to own *The Greatest Show on Earth*, only now in partnership with former Houston mayor Roy Hofheinz, a wealthy judge who had built the \$38 million Astrodome, at

which his Houston Astros played indoor baseball.

For several years John Ringling North had essentially been an absentee owner, managing the circus and collecting its profits from his home in Switzerland. Although he had previously considered selling the show, he was not truly convinced of the idea until he established a personal relationship with Feld, who was able to nudge the negotiation along by using his contacts at RCA to produce an album of North's musical compositions. The record, titled "Circus Brass," featured North's music arranged by Joe Sherman in the style of Herb Alpert, whose Tijuana Brass sound was gaining popularity in the mid-1960s. Just a few weeks before the album was released in early 1967, Feld and Sherman took the first pressing of the record to Zurich where they played the album for North and received his approval.²

Whether it was Irvin Feld stroking North's ego, or Hofheinz' bulging bank account, the various Ringling fac-



In a stunt worthy of Barnum, Irvin Feld, Roy Hofheinz, John Ringling North and Israel Feld met in Rome's ancient Coliseum to transfer ownership of the circus. The Ringling family sold the show for \$8 million cash on November 11, 1967.

Circus World Museum

tions agreed to sell to the circus. On November 11, 1967 the Feld brothers and Hofheinz, bought the show for \$8 million in cash, with Hofheinz pledging \$7.5 million and the Felds \$500,000. John Ringling North, with his 510 shares of circus stock, received \$4,080,000; the Edith Ringling estate, holding 315 shares, \$2,520,000; and the Robert Ringling estate, with 175 shares, received \$1,400,000. The deal also gave John Ringling North a lifetime salary of \$75,000 and his brother Henry \$20,000 a year as long as he remained as vice-president.³ The deal also said that John Ringling North would continue as producer for both the 1968 and 1969 seasons.

When the Hoffeld Corporation took possession, planning for the 1968 edition of the circus was well underway with all of the acts signed, production numbers on the drawing boards and costumes already being tailored. It was business as usual according to Henry Ringling North. "Nothing is changed except the ownership," he told a reporter. "As vice president I will be remaining on the show, and my brother continues as producer. There's nothing unusual about people selling their interests and then remaining in the organization."⁴

Looking back 50 years, juggler Gyorgy "Fudi" Zsilak, recalled that most of the performers took the change of ownership in stride. "Richard Barstow was still doing the choreography, Merle Evans was doing the music, and guys like Pat Valdo, Bob Dover and Lloyd Morgan were running the show. Irvin Feld was just learning the circus business and he had people there who had been doing it for 20 to 30 years. The Hungarian juggler added, "Those of us from eastern Eu-



For the 1968 season, singing ringmaster Harold Ronk delivered a performance that included show tunes along with contemporary rock and roll. Robert Handley photograph



The 98th edition of *The Greatest Show on Earth* was produced by John Ringling North and had been in the planning stages for months prior to the sale of the circus in the fall of 1967.

Chris Berry Collection

rope were just happy to have another year with Ringling.”⁵

According to press materials for the 98th edition, John Ringling North had signed more than 30 new acts from around the world for the new circus. Those who reviewed the show and those who were actively involved in the production have said the performance in 1968 was one of the best produced by North during the indoor era. During the opening number Harold Ronk sang an original song composed by Neol Regney with lyrics by Barstow. The song urged the audience to “Take a ride on a bubble, whether eighty years old, or eight! Children of All Ages, it’s circus time!”

Less than two months after Hofheinz and the Felds

closed on their purchase, the 1968 edition, produced by John Ringling North, opened in January at the Venice winter quarters, with the circus gradually making its way up the east coast to New York.

As the show was setting up in Baltimore on February 29, Irvin Feld spoke with a reporter for the Associated Press, and dropped a bombshell. Feld was planning to put out a second unit in 1969! “It will be the same size as this show,” he explained. “It will have the same type of productions, as many animals and as many acts. What we will do is rotate acts between the two shows. Instead of hiring them for one year, as we do now, we’ll hire them for two.”⁶

While at the Baltimore Civic Center, portions of the circus were videotaped for playback on the NBC television network. After a rehearsal on March 11, the show, hosted by Mike Douglas, was taped the next day. *Highlights from Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus*, aired nationwide on March 22 and *Variety* gave a thumbs-up to the special broadcast:

“Translating the three-ring circus into video terms is one of the touchier TV tasks, and director Walter Miller has done a superior job in bringing order out of the studied chaos in this fourth annual NBC-TV telecast of the opening of the season for

the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. A bit of confusion is part of the charm of the traditional sawdust epic, and Miller let enough of this to creep in to afford some feeling of spontaneity.

“The camera work, which is crucial to this operation, was excellent with a few exceptions. Miller framed the shows of the specialty acts with care and pulled back nicely for some of the pageantry. The most noticeable directional error occurred in working too close to the sprawling Coronation Ball spectacle, but this was somewhat necessitated by the fact that the event centered around the warbling of host Mike Douglas, who was pretty much lost in the shifting mass.”



One of the features of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1968 was Evy Althoff’s act which featured a 500 pound Siberian tiger riding a horse.

Robert Handley photograph

The review ended by saying that “new owners Roy Hofheinz along with Irvin and Israel Feld have wisely decided not to tamper with the traditions established by John and Henry Ringling North.”⁷

The 1968 elephant act was a contemporary production, designed to acknowledge the rock and roll era and the “British Invasion” which had brought America acts such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. Titled “Carnaby Street,” the elephant number turned the Ringling herd into flower children, with daisies painted on their backs. For the display, the cast dressed in miniskirts and bright colors popular at the time. Richard Barstow, who had been staging the circus for 20 years, explained the show’s “Mod” theme. “There has to be a new look,” he said. “I’m going to buy a Nehru jacket, though I don’t know if the elephants would want to wear them.”⁸

An audio recording of a performance at the Anaheim Convention Center in August, featured musical arrangements that reflected the times, and during the Carnaby Street elephant act Merle Evans led the band in a score that included “I Think I’m Going Out of My Mind,” “Georgy Girl,” “Let’s Spend the Night Together,” “Standing on the Corner,” and “Music to Watch Girls By.” Ringmaster Harold Ronk put it into perspective as he bellowed, “...Hold your hats, well bless my soul, the circus has gone rock n’ roll.”⁹

The aerial ballet was titled “Winter Wonderland,” and freshened up what had become a standard feature on the show. The display included the Hildalys performing their aerial act upside down, high in the arena dome. According to the Souvenir Mag-



The Ringling elephants were painted as “flower children” for the act titled “Carnaby Street.” The display featured rock and roll music and performers dressed in miniskirts and “mod” wardrobe.

Circus World Museum

azine & Program, the number was “an entirely new concept in aerial ballet, featuring 32 lovely ladies suspended from silver wands, attached to a revolving mid-air track.” The airborne spectacle depicted Winter at the Circus with members of the company dressed in ski outfits and transported in



The 1968 spec was titled “The Inaugural Ball” and was tied to the Presidential election year, the inauguration of President James Madison, and the opening of New York’s new Madison Square Garden.

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On March 13, 1968, the Felds hosted Lady Bird Johnson and a group of 6,000 underprivileged children to a preview performance at the Washington Coliseum. Left to right are Shirley Feld, Israel Feld, Irvin Feld, and the First Lady. "Prince Paul" Alpert is in the foreground at the left.

Circus World Museum

sleds. Tiny bubbles, simulating snowflakes, filled the arena during the production.¹⁰

The big production number of 1968 had loose ties to both the Presidential election year, and the fact that the circus would be making its debut at the new Madison Square Garden during its annual New York engagement. Titled "The Inaugural Ball," the spec was a play on words that paid tribute to the Inauguration of President James Madison and featured living statue acts and staging that included numerous lighted chandeliers in a setting reminiscent of Washington in the early 1800s.

When the circus made its actual appearance in the nation's capital on March 13, Mrs. Lyndon Johnson attended a preview performance. The First Lady hosted approximately 6,000 under-privileged and disabled children for the performance at the Washington Coliseum, and the next day many of those with the show were invited to the White House for a special tour. "I never forgot that," said Tito Gaona. "It was beautiful. It was very nice."¹¹

While the circus was in his hometown, Irvin Feld started a tradition that continued for several seasons, an invitation to join him for dinner at his home. "It was an amazing night," recalled Donna Ward Skura,

adding "It was the first time I had ever seen caviar." Tito Gaona agreed. "We had a beautiful dinner party at his apartment. All of the performers were there. Every year he would do something like that. Mr. Feld loved to play poker after dinner," the trapeze star recalled. "After we ate and socialized we would play cards; Mr. Feld, me, Charly Baumann, and sometimes Henry Ringling North and Paul Anka.

One thing that was never a gamble was the annual engagement in New York, and in 1968, after 38 years of performances at Madison Square Garden at 8th Avenue and 49th Street, the 98th edition of the circus moved to the new 20,000 seat arena built above Pennsylvania Station on Seventh Avenue between 31st and 33rd Streets. The new Garden opened February 11 with a benefit per-



Featured on the 98th Edition of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was The Flying Gaonas. (left to right, Victor, Chela, Armando and Tito Gaona).

Robert Handley photograph

formance for the USO starring Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Pearl Bailey. Three weeks later, and less than a month before the April 2nd opening performance, General Manager Tuffy Genders made his first trip to the new arena in advance of circus' arrival.¹²

Among those who were excited about the new Garden was Tito Gaona, who not only performed the triple somersault at the debut performance at the new arena, but had also featured it in the final performance in the old building. "It was amazing opening the new Madison Square Garden, but I am fortunate to have wonderful memories of the old Garden too. I am proud that I was able to perform the triple in the same building as Codona, and where Leitzel and all of the other great circus acts had appeared so long ago."¹³

One of the features that did not make the transition to the new arena was the side show, which had continued in the basement of the old Garden even after the tour moved exclusively to buildings. The configuration of the new arena no longer allowed for a "Congress of Freaks," although the gorilla Gargantua II was brought in for the New York date and was on exhibit in the area under the seats.¹⁴

At the end of the 40-day New York run, Irvin Feld reported that ticket sales at Madison Square Garden were 20% ahead of 1967. The bigger take came even though the show lost seven days because of preemptions and three days when the show had closed to observe the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The circus gave 71 performances during the New York engagement of 1968.¹⁵

While at the Garden, Feld was enthusiastic as he discussed his vision for a second unit. "The circus is now such a successful road attraction that we can't fill all the requests of the cities that want to book it. If we had a hundred weeks a year to play with we couldn't meet the demand."¹⁶

Not all of the old guard shared the passion of their new boss. Tuffy Genders, who had been with the show for decades, first as a performer and later General Manager, was tapped to build the new "Blue Unit." According to Kenneth Feld, Genders did not embrace the idea and the task was soon reassigned to Superintendent Lloyd Morgan.¹⁷ Genders' personal diaries, now at Illinois State University's Mil-



In late August 1968 Gunther Gebel-Williams made his first trip to the United States, visiting Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey for one day while the show was at the San Diego Sports Arena.

Circus World Museum

ner Library, describe the pressure he was under to get the new show ready. The journals provide detail on the many details involved, including the purchase of 25 railroad cars in January. They also tell how Morgan took over the assignment and left the traveling show on June 14 to start assembling the pieces of the new circus.¹⁸

Although the concept of a second unit was moving forward, Feld still did not have the performers or animals needed to fill out a complete performance, and not long after the New York opening, Feld, Roy Hofheinz and circus talent scout Trolle Rhodin made their first trip to Europe looking for acts for the new show. One of the features that Feld was hoping to sign was Gunther Gebel-Williams, star of Germany's Circus Williams.

After visiting several circuses during the spring and summer of 1968, Irvin Feld received a telephone call at his Berlin hotel room. "Mr. Feld? My name is Gunther Gebel-Williams. I hear you've been trying to find me."¹⁹

Not long after, in Salerno, Italy, Feld and Hofheinz visited the show and met Gunther for the first time.²⁰

During his time in Europe, Feld was introduced to Carola Williams and began the process of negotiating a lease on her entire circus. While such an arrangement would solve part of the staffing problem, no deal was possible without the star of the show agreeing to make the move to the United States. In late summer Feld invited Gunther Gebel-Williams to visit the show in San Diego.

After a whirlwind trip from Europe to America, which included Gebel-Williams' first ever airplane flight, the animal trainer visited the circus in San Diego, but for only one day. During his brief time at the San Diego Sports Arena, Gunther met with Feld and spent time visiting with Hugo Schmitt and Charly Baumann. According to Sigrig Gebel, Gunther was very impressed with the care given the animals. "That actually convinced him to make the move," she said, "as the care of animals was the number one priority in his life."²¹

The negotiation between Feld and Carola Williams then shifted into high gear, and after what Kenneth Feld later called "a tough bargain," she agreed to lease her circus for



In this photograph, taken in San Diego by circus fan Rosalie Hoffman, veteran elephant superintendent Hugo Schmitt introduces Gunther Gebel-Williams to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey herd.

Circus World Museum

five years, after which she could exercise an option to sell.²²

In late September, the first public announcement was made of the Circus Williams lease. The deal not only included performers Gunther Gebel-Williams, Sigrid Gebel and Jeanette Williams, but also a menagerie of 12 elephants, nearly 40 horses and 14 tigers.²³ Feld told *Variety* that the herds of animals needed for a successful circus were not readily available and that it was easier to acquire an entire circus rather than buy and train new animals.²⁴

With tigers, elephants and horses taken care of other staffing shortages still had to be addressed, including recruiting a second clown alley for the new show. Even before Feld hatched the idea for a second unit, he had realized that the clowns on his payroll were aging. There were 17 clowns with the circus in 1968, and the show included solo turns by 80-year old Paul Wenzel, 72-year old Otto Griebeling and 65-year old Lou Jacobs. In fact, there were very few clowns with the show under the age of 50, something that did not escape Feld on his first visit to the alley, after which he quipped, "I know they can fall down, I'm just not sure they can get up."²⁵

One of those who Feld had hired to help with the transition from the John Ringling North era was Mel Miller, himself once a Ringling-Barnum clown, and for seven years curator of the Sarasota's John Ringling Museum of the American Circus (now the Ringling Museums).

Among Miller's friends was a Sarasota clown named

Danny Chapman and his wife, trapeze artist Sarah Chapman. While brainstorming one night over dessert and coffee, the three of them came up with an idea. "Irvin Feld had gone to Mel Miller and told him they were planning to duplicate the show and they needed 30 new clowns," Chapman recalled. "But there weren't that many clowns available anywhere. That night the three of us came up with the idea to create a school for clowns. Mel said that he would take it to the Felds and see what they thought, and the rest is history."²⁶

The first public announcement of the "College for Clowns" appeared in a *Los Angeles Times Magazine* article penned by Bill Ballentine in July while the show was at the Forum in Inglewood. Among those quoted in the article was Duane "Uncle Soapy" Thorpe, who said, "It will be a real good thing. It takes too long and it's too much trouble to have on-the-job training in this crazy business." The sentiment was echoed by Mark Anthony who said, "You can't join a circus with only a pretty wardrobe and an 8x10 glossy of yourself in makeup. You need training in how to get laughs, in how to move, expressions that will carry, how to take a buster and some know-how in building props professionally. It is not as simple as most people think it is."²⁷

Despite the press releases and positive spin, Feld's long-time marketing chief Allen Bloom, recalled in later years that things were not exactly as they appeared in print. Bloom, who was Director of Tours in 1968, said that when the school was announced many of the veteran clowns were

reluctant to teach, because they believed that they were being asked to train their replacements.²⁸

Performer Donna Ward Skura echoed that sentiment as she reflected on the announcement 50 years later. Skura said many on the show scoffed at the idea of a school for clowns. “The general consensus was that it was stupid. Many of us came from a world where you were born into it and you paid your dues. The feeling was that clowning was an art and couldn’t be taught.”²⁹

A week after Ballentine’s article appeared, the show arrived in Phoenix, and in an interview with the *Arizona Republic*, Irvin Feld spoke not only of the College of Clowns, but also gushed about the demand from the public to create the second unit. Feld said that the new show, which even at that early date he called “The Blue Unit,” would take the circus to 42 more cities bringing the total number of arenas played by the two circuses to almost 100. Feld also predicted that by 1975 a third complete show might be needed to play a new generation of arenas that were still on the drawing board.³⁰

As the end of the season approached, Irvin Feld’s management team was faced with a multitude of loose ends. Along with the enormous task of outfitting an entirely new railroad circus, acts still needed to be signed, showgirls needed to be hired and of course qualified students had to

be recruited for the new College of Clowns.

One of the members of that first graduating class was 18-year-old Scott Bryan, who lived in Long Beach, California. During the 1967 season, Bryan, an amateur magician and clown, had won a contest to appear in a performance at the Long Beach Arena. Among those he met that day was west coast promoter Shirley Carroll, who remembered the teenager a year later. When word came of the project she reached out to him. “Shirley called and said, ‘Do you want to be a clown with the circus? All you have to do is go to Florida for two months and you will be more-or-less guaranteed a job next season.’”³¹

With little more than the promise of fulfilling a dream, Bryan dropped out of college and left for Sarasota where he was met at the airport by instructor Danny Chapman. At first Bryan bunked on the Chapmans’ couch and each morning he and Danny Chapman would drive to Venice where Bryan would wander around the winter quarters. It was not long before several others from that first class arrived, including Frosty Little, Eric Braun, Jerry Bisby and Keith Crary.

Bryan credits the success of that first class to Chapman who scavenged for props and even took to the streets of Venice and Sarasota to find recruits. “People don’t understand that without him we wouldn’t have been able to do anything. Even though Mel Miller was in charge, he was more involved



The first Clown College students assembled for classes in the Venice Circus Arena shortly after the circus ended its 1968 tour. Among the instructors were Otto Griebeling and Lou Jacobs.

Circus World Museum



New circus owners Roy Hofheinz and Irvin Feld became part of the act when Otto Griebling singled them out while he tried to make a delivery during the debut performance at the new Madison Square Garden.

Chris Berry Collection

with public relations and we didn't see much of him."³²

The potential clowns had already spent several days in Venice preparing for classes when the show train arrived in late November after closing in Macon, Georgia. Once the train was unloaded, the rookie clowns were given bunks and the instruction began.

"Lou and Otto came right away, and they were the greatest," Bryan recalled. "Pat Valdo was there every day, watching in the front row as Danny ran the classes." As Bryan remembers, during the first several days there was not much actual instruction other than some tutoring on makeup and juggling. "There were no courses, we were winging it every day."³³

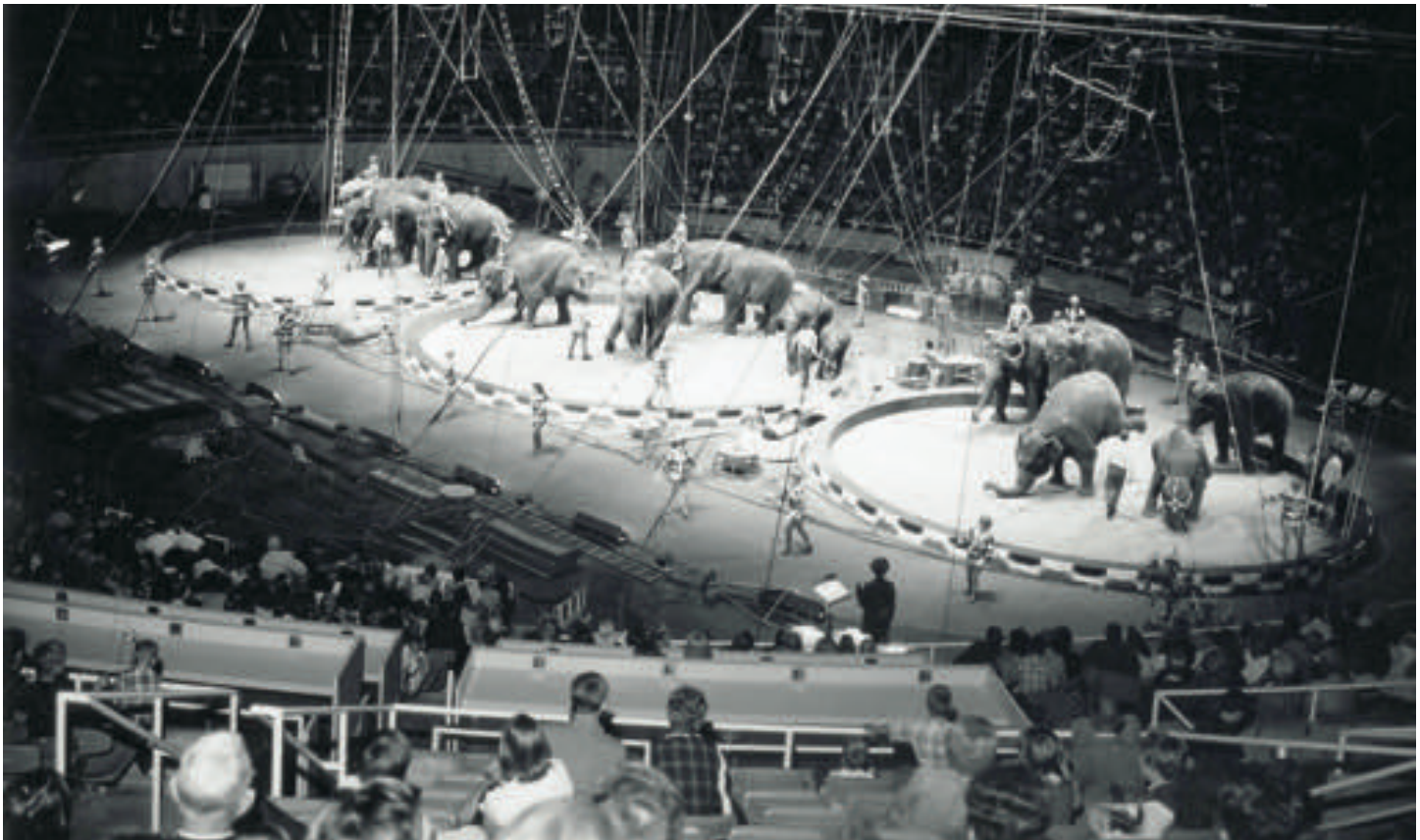
After six weeks of training, 26 prospective clowns completed the curriculum, and according to *Variety* all of them were offered contracts for the 1969 season. The graduation ceremony, held shortly before Christmas, was presided over by Irvin Feld who presented diplomas to the newly minted clowns.³⁴

As the new clowns were learning their craft, the Venice winter quarters was buzzing. The Circus Williams animals arrived on November 18,³⁵ and for the first time since the show had relocated from Sarasota the winter quarters was closed to the public. Ringling officials said the decision was made because of the additional animals on the property

along with a multitude of activities that might create a hazard to the public.³⁶

During November and December, rehearsals were underway for both circuses, the first time since 1938 that the Ringling organization was fielding two separate shows, and in late November Antoinette Concello began auditioning new showgirls who would travel with the two productions. One of those who was hired was Joyce Stack, a 20-year old junior at the University of Wisconsin who had seen her first circus performance only a few months before in Madison. "I followed the circus to Chicago and decided right then and there I had to be a part of it," she recalled as she spoke of being interviewed by Ms. Concello. "She told me to take off 20 pounds and then come and see her. I starved myself and was only able to drop 15 pounds." Although she didn't quite achieve her goal she was hired.³⁷

Meanwhile Irvin Feld continued making headlines by announcing extraordinary, and sometimes embellished plans that he had for the future of the circus. Shortly after Judy Ford was named Miss America in September 1968, she was offered a contract with the circus. Ford had dazzled the judges with her gymnastic and trampoline routine, and Feld believed she would be a star attraction, though she never actually joined the show.³⁸ Every few weeks there was a new story that was published in newspapers from coast to coast,



The Ringling herd of 1968 was made up of 17 Asian elephants under the command of Hugo Schmitt who was marking his 42nd year working with elephants.

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including the announcement that Red Skelton had been added to the faculty of the College of Clowns, a press release that was more ballyhoo than reality.³⁹

In early November, Florida Governor Claude Kirk announced that a new multi-million-dollar circus winter quarters would be built just north of Sarasota in Manatee County. The 600-acre complex was to be built just east of U.S. Route 301 north of County Line Road. The Governor said that Judge Hofheinz had taken out an option on land that was expected to generate \$50-\$60 million in economic development for both Sarasota and Manatee Counties. By the end of the year Hofheinz' options on the property began expiring and the project was abandoned. Although the Circus World theme park did open only a few years later near Orlando, the winter quarters would remain in Venice until the end of the 1992 season.⁴⁰

It has been said that every promoter and entertainer dreams of being involved in a show that is better than any other and recognized as the best in the world – a performance that is truly *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Irvin Feld was literally given that chance and seized the opportunity. Within a year after taking ownership, Feld changed the dynamics of the American circus for decades to come. Although John Ringling North was still billed as the producer in 1969, Feld had quickly and firmly placed his own stamp on the circus.

Within a matter of months Feld's vision had created second unit of the circus, and with that came the acquisition of

25 railroad cars, ownership of the largest herd of elephants in the world, and the introduction of a German animal trainer who would soon become a household name across America. Another venerable institution, Clown College, had grown from an idea to reality in just a few weeks, a concept that would expand in the coming years and bring dozens of new clowns into a profession that had been rapidly aging. And finally, the introduction of a second touring unit allowed the powerful Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey brand to return to dozens of towns which had been excluded from the indoor tour simply because there were not enough days in the year.

With the infusion of capital from Roy Hofheinz, the partners were able to put money into fulfilling their dreams, and in doing so develop new revenue streams and audiences, invigorating what had been a mature brand and positioning it as a fresh new form of entertainment for the last decades of the 20th century.

Prior to their circus ownership the Feld brothers had achieved great success promoting shows as diverse as ballets and wrestling, but now the rock groups and symphony orchestras would have to take a back seat to wire-walkers, jugglers and tigers. Big new ideas were becoming reality for the circus, and as 1968 came to a close, Roy Hofheinz, Irvin and Israel Feld were solidifying their control, along with their commitment to fulfill their dream of producing what was truly *The Greatest Show on Earth*. **BW**

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The Ringling herd is seen outside of the Assembly Hall at the University of Illinois on September 27, 1968, the first time the circus had played Champaign since 1955. Former CHS President Tom Parkinson was executive director for the arena at the time, and he was instrumental in bringing the circus back to Central Illinois after it began exhibiting in buildings.

Circus World Museum



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The Lou Jacobs poster was in its 10th season of use when Sverre Braathen photographed this billing stand for the show's appearance in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1953.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

The legendary clown Lou Jacobs was interviewed by John Daniel Draper at the Great Circus Parade showgrounds in July 1989. Lou had accepted an invitation from Circus World Museum to ride as a guest of honor in a carriage in the parade, and he was in Milwaukee a couple of days early for the event.

Jacobs: No, he was my oldest brother.

Draper: Was he a clown?



An Interview with Lou Jacobs

Draper: We are certainly honored to have you here. When did your career start here in America? Was it in the '20s?

Jacobs: I came over in 1923 out of the western part of Germany. Matter of fact, it was after the First World War.

Draper: Were you a clown then?

Jacobs: Not really. I had a lot of ambitions for being a clown, a performer. My brother was in this business, show business.

Draper: He wasn't a twin was he?

Jacobs: He was a straight man. We worked in tights, like you have in...(unintelligible).

Draper: Were your parents in show business?

Jacobs: No, No. My brother and I were about the only ones.

Draper: Did he come over to this country?

Jacobs: He was playing Moscow, the big cities there in Russia. Then he signed a contract for North America where the... (unintelligible). On the way to the border, they stopped the train because the war broke out. Then [my brother] and his partner were on the train, [along with] his partner's wife. They pulled everybody out of the train to line up in front.

They sorted out nationalities. Then they sorted out any companionship, like the relatives or friends or partners. Then they said that on the other side of the street, there was [another railroad track] with a boxcar train. [They told] everybody to pile in there. Then they locked the door and they took off to Siberia.

Draper: That was a living death.

Jacobs: Three weeks of that...they almost froze to death. They had to break some of the boards off in the box car and start a fire. Because he was a civil prisoner. He wasn't a war prisoner.

Draper: When you came into this country, did you go with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey right away, or not?

Jacobs: No...[my brother] came back after the war, and he left for North

American with...
(unintelligible). Then I wrote him a letter that if he could give me the fare to come, I would go too. So he sent me \$150, and I bought a ticket on a steamer. Then I left [Germany].

Draper: Could you speak any English then?

Jacobs: No, I learned a couple of words on the boat, but they were dirty.

Draper: You always learn them first. So, you learned English in this country?

Jacobs: You don't find out what [certain words] mean until you talk to the wrong guy.

Draper: That's exactly right. That is the way it seems to be.

Jacobs: I had an uncle in Brooklyn. He had a delicatessen store there for many years. Matter of fact...I stayed with him for a little while. Through him, I got a job that was advertised in *The Billboard*. That was a small troupe. As a matter of fact, it was two people and a dog.

Draper: Where did you play, in theaters?

Jacobs: They were looking for a partner you know. Through him, because he could read English, I went and met this guy. Then, of course, this guy – one of his partners there – was an old man. He had cauliflower ears. He used to be a catcher in a big teeterboard act. But they had split up. So he did his own little vaudeville act. So I joined him. That [was] the way I got into show business here.

Draper: In that act you were...

Jacobs: I was doing clowning then.

Draper: What did you wear? Were you a white face clown then?



Jacobs: I was doing the...
(unintelligible). I had baggy pants and a coat and all that.

Draper: That was your first clowning more or less?

Jacobs: I used to stand by in the wings while he was working. I watched him. I just couldn't take standing there like a totem pole. I starting mocking [him] and moving around a little bit. The first thing you know, I had a giggle, and the next thing I had a big giggle, and then [they] started laugh-



Lou Jacobs was a highly creative performer who appeared with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey for 60 years. His one-man band gag was photographed in July 1951 in Winona, Minnesota.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections



Lou Jacobs hammed it up for scores of press photographs used to promote the Ringling-Barnum Circus.

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ing. When he got through with the show, he said, “What the hell...[why is it] that they laugh about me.” He forgot he had a comedian. I didn’t say anything, but to find out what was going on, he had his wife sit in the seats. He said [to her], “You watch and see what this guy is doing and why they are laughing.” She told him that I was mocking him.

Draper: There was no speaking part at all? It was all pantomime?

Jacobs: He was doing a trick. I was imitating him and [gesturing] to the audience.

Draper: You always did pantomime – never a speaking part?

Jacobs: I never learned any, except by myself [when I was not performing]. I just went with my thought, [what I was thinking].

Draper: That pantomime is more in line with what you would do in a big show like Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. You couldn’t have a speaking part [in a show like that].

Jacobs: A lot of kids have to go to school and learn. But for

some reason or another, I pictured myself out there and brought out this mime from the heart.

Draper: When did you go over to the big show? On Ringling?

Jacobs: When they moved from Bridgeport.

Draper: That was in late 1927.

Jacobs: After I quit this guy I was working with, you know after a year, I got another job with another old fella, who came from England. He had a trapeze act, a double trapeze. He was a contortionist. I was a contortionist [too]. So I joined him and we practiced in New York before the show came. The show came from Bridgeport out by the old, old, guns, on 27th Street. I didn’t know that. He never told me, but he [told me] we got a job. He moved into the ring and so did I.

Draper: This was when you were learning English, all along now too?

Jacobs: Yes. In my spare time, I used to go to the movies. I just loved movies. So I used to watch the movies.

Draper: Can you still speak German now or are you...

Jacobs: Oh, yea. So I watched the movies and the mimes in the movies "told" me what they were talking about. I put two and two together. And so I learned my language and writing. I remembered how the letters were written, what they meant, and then I remembered it and I wrote it. So I got free schooling. I didn't graduate, but I did alright.

Draper: You did better than just graduate. You graduated all right. When did you develop some of your more classic acts, like the little automobile and so on?

Jacobs: As you would know yourself, today isn't what it was like 20 years ago. The first time I went to Los Angeles, California [it was] with a house trailer and my wife. I got into that mess there about 5:00 in the afternoon on the freeway, and there were six lanes deep there. I didn't know whether I was coming or going. I couldn't move over one lane or another, because there was no room. They were bumper to bumper. So I left one lane open in case somebody wanted to pass, and then even if they [passed] by they were hollering at me, "Get off of here. You're going too slow," or something. It came to my mind, God Almighty these automobiles! What about if I had a little automobile, being a contortionist, and I [could] crawl in there. So I built it. I was living with the Wallendas then, the hire wire act. They were good friends of mine. Their grandfather was a kind of mechanic. So he helped me put it together.

Draper: That was your original car?

Jacobs: I still have it today.

Draper: Did it run on gasoline?

Jacobs: Oh yea, [it had] a little motor. The smallest car, the [smallest] gas motor car in the world. Of course, I was a little ahead of the Volkswagons. I had my motor already [mounted] in the back.

Draper: I don't know how you got into that thing. You must have really folded yourself to get in there.

Jacobs: You know, it's surprising after maybe 40 years, but I can [still] go in there today.

Draper: You had at that time the face that made you famous, the clown face, the long elongated face?

Jacobs: Yea. The time that came on was in the 1930s. I was working white face by then.

Draper: Was Pat Valdo working as a clown then or was he earlier?

Jacobs: Yea, he was a clown.

Draper: Was he clowning when you were there or had it been before?

Jacobs: He was their clown before. He was doing white face, but he was [also] doing a boomerang act. He was throwing them inside the tent around the quarter poles. My God, they

Lou Jacobs applied his experience as a contortionist to squeeze into his tiny clown car, circle the hippodrome track, and exit the vehicle adjacent to the center ring on the front track.

This photo was taken on August 14, 1947.

Illinois State
University
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Lou Jacobs took a moment to pose with performer Mabel Ringling, c. 1946. Mabel, the daughter of Aubrey and Richard T. Ringling, was the granddaughter of Alf. T. Ringling.

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came back to him. But then I saw pictures of him, and that's how I knew Pat then. Then going home at night, we only had one or two buses, and everybody wants to get home [to the train]. So when you have white makeup on, you had to bring it way down your neck, and [that made for] a lot more makeup to take off.

Draper: Then you had a high collar around your neck, or not?

Jacobs: I had pretty close to it. But you had to make up your neck too so it didn't show. By taking that off, you blow both buses. So there you are. So I got to thinking, there must be a way out [of this predicament]. Then I changed my makeup. [It was] the same makeup, but I put it in flesh. Then it didn't take me but a minute to take it off, and I went home with the bus. So that was the reason I changed. The character, my character, really fits my personality.

Draper: You have to find that. You were with the Ringling show for many, many years. Were you there at the time of the fire in Hartford?

Jacobs: I have to say this, I was and I wasn't. You wonder why?

Draper: Were you in advance?

Jacobs: No, I was on the show. But the day that fire broke out, that was around 2:15 in the afternoon when the show had started, I took a bus to see my brother in upstate New York.

Draper: So you were away on a visit.

Jacobs: I didn't know there was anything until the next morning about 4:00 in the morning. At 4:00 in the morning, we were listening to the radio. We didn't have a TV Here it came. After breakfast there, I took off right away. My... (unintelligible) and my props [I] had in the big top. But then there were some of the boys good enough to put them out of there, [although] one of them got burned pretty bad, but [they] saved most of it.

Draper: Did your children, Lou Ann and Dolly, did they grow up on the show when they were little kids?

Jacobs: Yea. When the first one was born there was a strike there in 1938, in Scranton, [Pennsylvania]. We went home and I stayed home, and some of the other performers went on the Hagenbeck-Wallace show because Ringling had bought it. But then they overcrowded their big performance. They had to double up and all that stuff. It wasn't made for so many people. So I decided to stay home. But when I was home, there were several other people home [too]. One of them was Fred Bradna and (unintelligible). We promoted, got together in Sarasota and opened up a...show similar to the Ringling show. I [remember] the name sounded similar. A one ring circus. We had a guy there that was in the automobile business that owned Sparks Circus. He bought the Sparks Circus.

Draper: Edgar?

Jacobs: No. He was in an automobile [business]. We hired him for the advance man. We didn't know whether he knew someone. But anyhow, we needed help, you know. So we took out of Sarasota.

Draper: How did you travel, on a train?

Jacobs: No. We had cars and trucks and stuff like that. We went upstate, playing all these little towns. We went...up the middle of the state, and we pulled into town there. A cop was standing there, and I pulled up to him and I said, "Would you know where that circus is going to be?" He said, "What circus?" "[I said] we're supposed to have a show here, Circus Supreme" or whatever the name was. He said, "I never heard of it. I think you got the wrong town." By God, I couldn't figure that out, but he never got to know about it until the show started, and we were there. We showed and then we went on and ended up in Quincy, Florida. It's above Tallahassee. That's where we did all of that show.

Draper: Were you using newspaper ads or bills?

Jacobs: We used anything that was available. Besides that, I

used to go in the morning, sit on the front fender of the car with a mike, talking, talking all over town. "Come and see us."

Draper: Did you have any animals?

Jacobs: I had a little dog I think, and let me see...I don't think we had...(unintelligible).

Draper: You had the little dog with the huge rope, didn't you?

Jacobs: I had the biggest Dachshund that was alive in the world. You know what it was, a pup Dachshund. But I had two...(unintelligible)...and I put one on the front and one on the back.

Draper: Didn't you have the little dog with the big rope on it?

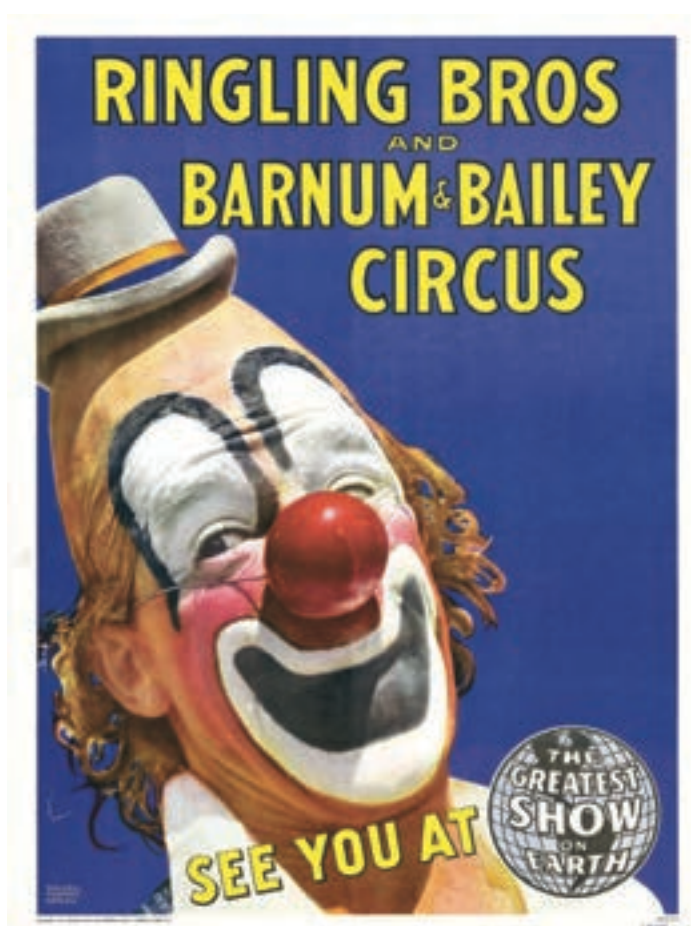
Jacobs: Yea, I had that too.

Draper: You did the one with the rabbit shooting the rabbit.

Jacobs: Johnny Bell used to do that on the show. After he passed away, I thought maybe I'd keep up the tradition. I always mention his name because I let him have the credit.

Draper: How did you get that dog to drop over when you would shoot things, cue him?

Jacobs: I don't know...you know they don't talk back to you, but it seems like you can read their mind when they look at you when you practice something. But I pictured this dog up in the winter quarters. They had about eight or nine dogs then, and they were going to have somebody train some of the dogs to go on the road. But when it got to rehearsals, you didn't have time to eat – morning, noon, or night. It got to the last week where we were going to dress rehearsal, and the dogs, they were still out there in the pen. Nobody trained them because there was nobody that had time. So I looked at those dogs one time back there, and when I got near I thought they were going to kill me, or something. They had a grudge against me, or something. They didn't know me because I had no makeup on. Then I said, let me get out of here. [Some of them were] big ones too. Of all the dogs, this one I picked there at the last minute, he was the worst one of the whole bunch. He barked so much during the time he was there, that he lost his voice and squeaked. He squeaked so loud, like somebody put something in your ear. So I said, any dog but him. And you know something, when it came to the final week there, I had an idea for coming home as a fisherman with a pole and a line, the bobber and the hook on the end. I went to the taxidermy and got a fish there about two feet long. I told him I'd like to have a fish skeleton, just a head and the bones. I put that on the hook. I had the dog follow me, made up as a cat with a big stomach, like he ate the bloomin' fish. That was Knucklehead. The boys there at



This classic poster for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was first printed in 1944. The same design with Lou's clown face was still being used more than 20 years later.

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the winter quarters gave him the name Knucklehead. When the day came, I had the prop, I had to get him. So he didn't know me from Adam, but by that time I had my makeup on. I said, "Here's the idea. If you want to go on the road, you cooperated with me and we both will get along fine." I put him on the table. I said, "This isn't going to hurt. I'll just put this suit on you and you just follow me." It was like talking to somebody that I knew all along. I went in and did the gag and I gave him credit, and I gave him something to eat, and boy we were partners from then on.

Draper: What did he die of, old age I guess?

Jacobs: He had developed a little inside sickness there and I lost...(unintelligible) just recently, we lost three more.

Draper: Did you try to train another one to replace him?

Jacobs: Yea, he got caught in Chicago in the old Amphitheater. We were parked in the back there by the train. He got caught with some other dog that belonged to a flying act. They got together, and then it was too late. I could've had her taken care of, but then I thought maybe it's good to have some puppies. So we had eight puppies out of him. I don't



Jacobs shared a paper with one of the Ringling-Barnum giraffes at the winter quarters in Sarasota.

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know where they came from. If somebody told me that dog is going to have eight puppies, I wouldn't believe it. Anyhow, they all came out in the living room, one after another. I said push, push. You know I was talking to him while she was having her babies. Push one after another. I said, "It's about time you quit you know." Finally, he came up with a little one like that. God Almighty, I hoped that's the last one. Sure enough, that was the last one. That was the runt of the family. He'd go up a little bit, but he couldn't get to her milk. The other guys were all big and heavy. So I had to drag some of them off and put him in there to get something to eat. One day he was sick. Then I was worried about him.

Draper: So you were traveling everyday with them?

Jacobs: [No], that was home in the wintertime. It's a good thing he had the puppies in the wintertime. I wouldn't know how to handle it on the road. But anyway, I called the vet up and he says give him an enema. I said, "What? Enema? I don't know what an enema is." [He said], "Well, I'll tell you. Just take a little soda and a little lukewarm water and put it up his keester." So I did that and by God, boy he straightened out like nobody's business.

Draper: That one you trained.

Jacobs: He was very good from then on.

Draper: That's very, very interesting.

Jacobs: Then I broke another one in there. I did the little elephant...they had a tiger suit and different animals.

Draper: I always liked that act. I don't think you did the one where the guys walked along with that darn plank. He'd turn around and walk the other way.

Jacobs: Bruce Randolph used to come on the show.

Draper: He was related to Lillian Leitzel.

Jacobs: Yea, right. He did it first. But then after he passed away, we had other guys do it. But it was a good gag.

Draper: The one where they get in the fight and he knocks off his head completely and runs off without a head?

Jacobs: We had Paul Jung there. He was doing a soldier gag. This one guy was a short guy, and we built his shoulders up over his head. He got all messed up and then he knocked his head off.

Draper: The other one I liked was the one-man band where



Lou Jacobs accepted an invitation to ride in the 1989 Great Circus Parade staged by Circus World Museum. The parade made its way through the streets of Milwaukee on Sunday, July 16 as a crowd estimated at 700,000 acknowledged Lou with their applause.

Greg Parkinson collection

you got to beating the drums and all the other stuff.

Jacobs: I still got that one... I've got my suit at home with all the bells on top.

Draper: Those were great days, and there were so many clowns at that time. You were one of the foremost ones, but there were a lot of other very good clowns. We don't have them anymore. What's the reason?

Jacobs: You wonder why not everybody?

Draper: I mean, why isn't there a Lou Jacobs coming along now? Why is that?

Jacobs: I guess I should've had a son or something, you know.
Draper: Why is it that they go to school to study [clowning] and there's [only] some that come out of it.

Jacobs: Yea, they have every possibility.

Draper: Some of them come out of it, but you don't have those great clowns that we had in those days. There's one that I saw from Australia – this Ashton. He could look at you in such a contemptuous way. It was the most amusing thing I've ever seen. We were in Tivoli one time...

Jacobs: He was a good worker too.

Draper: Doug Ashton, yes.

Jacobs: He's over in Australia now. I hear he's coming back.

Draper: He was good. I saw him performing at the Circus Hall of Fame in Florida one time. You were on the show in 1956 at the time that it closed under canvas in Pittsburg, weren't you?

Jacobs: We went into buildings.

Draper: Do you think that there will be clowns coming along? There has to be a place for clowns.

Jacobs: I tell you what. What's the future of it? Since we have all the Clown Colleges, there's every possibility of clowns. You don't have to be all of them, but there always will be some...that are outstanding and some...(unintelligible).

Draper: This Grandma act is a pretty good act.

Jacobs: Right. They couldn't get it any place else, the experience like in the Clown College, because they learn more there in eight weeks than they would in eight years [somewhere else].

Draper: What is the role of a clown really? What is he doing? Is he trying to make people forget the cares of the world, or is he making an estimate of the foolishness of a man. I mean really a man is trying to strive to be successful, and there's something that gets in his way. What is it?

Jacobs: A clown develops if he stays in long enough. The whole thing boils down to time. If you have any partners or



Lou Jacobs performed several walk-around gags with one of his small dogs during his time with the Ringling Red Unit, appearing in large arenas from coast to coast.

Circus World Museum

old-timers where you can learn from [them] while you're in front of the public, that helps you a lot more. By being in the business and putting in the time, you create your own self. By watching all the other guys, you come up with something that you would like to have for yourself. Through that, you find these special characters that come out with ideas that fit them, like this Grandma. Nobody has to tell him that, but it's a living character when you can see him walk on the stage. A living character. So each clown has the desire, the aim for something big, something personal. If you stay long enough in the business, you can't help [but] develop something on your own.

Draper: Lou, I think this has been wonderful. I don't want to detain you here, but I have enjoyed very, very much talking with you. This has been a great treat. It's been a thrill.

Jacobs: Nice talking to you. You're welcome. It takes an old-timer to think back and look back and then repeat to tell you what goes on. **BW**

In this transcript of the interview, some of the tenses of verbs have been corrected and words that have been inserted to clarify meaning are indicated in brackets. The audio recording of this interview is available on Circus World Museum's website: www.circusworldbaraboo.org.



About the Interviewer

John Daniel Draper and his wife, Rosalie, raised their family in Bethany, West Virginia where "Dan" served as Professor of Chemistry at Bethany College. For many summers during the 1960s and 1970s, Dan and Rosalie took their family to Baraboo, Wisconsin where all six of the Drapers worked at Circus World Museum. Dan volunteered at the Museum's Library & Research Center for more than 20 years. He has been a long-term member of the Circus Historical Society. He has pursued an avid interest in equestrian acts and circus riders, and his research has led to the publication of numerous articles in *Bandwagon*. Dan currently lives in Sarasota.



Lou's daughters, Lou Ann and Dolly, grew up in Sarasota and later joined their famous father on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. Soon they each became world-class aerialists and circus performers. This photo was taken on October 8, 1972 in Champaign, Illinois.

Robert Handley photograph

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(Signed by)
Martha Roth Wells, 9/27/18.

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